

W. Beaton (J.)

THE
DIVINE RIGHT
OF A
CHRISTIAN

TO
FREEDOM of ENQUIRY
AND

FREEDOM of PRACTICE
In Religious Matters,

EVINCED FROM
The CHRISTIAN RECORDS.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED
Some Motives to enforce the Exercise
of that Right ;

AND
A few Directions relative to the proper
Regulation of it.

*Render to Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's,
and to God the things which are God's.
Matt. 22. 21.*

*Prove all things : hold fast that which is good.
1 Theff. 5. 21.*

HULL Printed, and Sold by Messrs. RIVINGTONS
in St. Paul's Church-Yard, LONDON.

The following Pamphlets,
Written by the Author of this Tract,
are sold by Messrs. RIVINGTONS,
in St. Paul's Church-Yard, London.

Dialogues on the *Divine Character* of Christ.

Price 2 s. 6 d.

——— on the *Satisfaction* of Christ.

Price 2 s.

Divine Philanthropy : A Poetical Essay.

Price 1 s. 6 d.

The *Duty* and *Interest* of Men, as Members
of *Civil Society* : A Sermon. Price 6 d.

T H E
P R E F A C E.

THOUGH the title of this little piece be, *The divine right of a CHRISTIAN*, the author would by no means insinuate, that men in general have not a right to judge and act for themselves, in whatever relates to the affairs of religion. Quite the reverse. For he is fully persuaded, that absolute liberty in those matters, provided we do not molest our fellow-citizens by such liberty, is a right essential to our nature as reasonable creatures, subject to the universal Sovereign and Judge: a right which every individual holds, independently of all others; and for the abuse of which (so far as that abuse is merely personal) he is accountable only to God.

But the reason why the author addresses himself to Christians particularly, is, partly the inattention which many of them discover towards the rule of their religion, and partly (what is indeed a consequence of the former) their believing and practising several things on the authority of others merely, which have not, even themselves being judges, the least foundation either in the writings of Christ or of his apostles. These things he has observed with a considerable degree both of astonishment and concern: he therefore thinks it his duty to bear a testimony against such a

procedure ; though he has sufficient reason to believe, that no considerable alteration will be effected by any thing he can urge, since writings of this kind are but little read, and still less regarded.

If, however, any thing contained in the following pages, be influential over even a few, so as to excite in them a growing regard to the scriptures, he shall think that a real service is done to the cause of Christianity ; and, in this view, it will give him considerable pleasure.—Conscious that the religion of Jesus in all its parts, wants nothing to recommend it, but an honest, dispassionate enquiry into its nature, evidences, and rewards, he is desirous to contribute what lies in his power, that its professors may be acquainted with it in its native purity. And as he is clearly of opinion, that, of all others, the greatest mean to obtain such an acquaintance, is to be conversant with the sacred writings, especially the New Testament ; so to engage all the professed disciples of Jesus, to draw their religion from that only genuine source, is the motive that induced him to publish this tract.

Since, however, it would be premature, and even culpable, to enforce the exercise of a right, had not the right itself a real existence ; the author has produced the proof of its being actually contained in the great charter of the Christian's privileges, and he flatters himself the proof is clear and decisive. Other arguments, he doubts

The P R E F A C E.

v

not, and perhaps equally as strong as any he has urged, may be drawn from the same source. But, since those he has brought into view, appear to him entirely sufficient for the purpose he intends them, he was unwilling to protract the subject to a greater length; especially as he is desirous it may be read by those Christians, who have it not in their power to lay out much money in the purchase of books.

Should any of his readers think that there are some expressions he has used which seem too strong, and may be thought to militate against that due subordination which Political or Civil Society requires; he assures them Religious liberty is the sole object he has in view: and should there be any sentences in the following tract, where the Christian's right is asserted, and the term religious is not expressed, he begs, once for all, that they may be considered as corresponding with the contents of the title page.*

It is of little concern to him what names Christians may be called by, whether as terms of distinction, or names of reproach, since these make no alteration in the nature of Christianity. But he is concerned, nay even anxiously desirous, that

* Should any reader of this tract be desirous of knowing the author's sentiments with respect to Civil, or Political duties, he refers them to a Sermon entitled, *The Duty and Interest of Men as Members of Civil Society*: preached February 27, 1778.

every disciple of Jesus be able to give a scriptural reason both for what he believes and what he practises, since a deficiency in this, in his opinion, reflects disgrace on the Christian character. When a professor of Christianity, for example, is asked Why he believes this doctrine, or practises that duty, how low, how mean, how disgraceful is it for him to reply, It is contained in such a confession, or it is believed and practised by this or the other man, who is eminent for his literature and piety! But when he can say Thus Christ and his apostles have taught, and thus they have commanded, and therefore I so believe, and so practise, it is at once satisfactory, just, and honourable!

That every one who names the name of Christ, may be thus instructed, and furnished to every good work, is the sincere desire of

the reader's well-wisher

HULL, JOHN BEATSON.
23 OC 62
August 10, 1779.

T H E

Divine Right of a Christian, &c.

CHAPTER I.

The Introduction : in which the Nature of the right, and the Foundations it is built on, are briefly specified.

THE right which is pleaded for in the following pages, consists in A man's determining for himself in all matters of religion, by exercising his own understanding on the Christian scriptures : or, in other words, to embrace, profess, and defend, whatever he apprehends to be religious truth or duty, without discouragement or restraint from men.

Such is the nature of that right I at present contend for ; and I call it *divine*, because (as I hope fully to prove by decisive arguments) a Christian is invested with it by credentials from heaven.

Now this right, which is certainly of all others the most valuable and important, is built on the following stable foundations : That religion, strictly considered, is entirely a *personal* concern, and altogether foreign to the nature, object, and use, of civil magistracy :—That the Lord Jesus Christ is the only sovereign of conscience ; which authority

he continues to exercise *himself*, and has not constituted any delegates:—That the sacred scriptures are a perfect rule in all religious concerns, containing whatever is necessary for us, as Christians, either to believe or to practise:—and That every Christian is, or may be, a competent judge of the various branches of revealed truth, at least so far as relates to his everlasting salvation.

These foundations are firm as a rock, and can never be shaken by all the artillery either of earth or of hell. Here then the intelligent Christian fixes his foot, and with the Bible in his hand (the grand repository of his religion) repels the assaults of aspiring men, whenever they attempt to make encroachments on him. On this basis he erects his superstructure; which, from the nature of the materials it is composed of, as well as the foundations it rests on, will bear the greatest storms that can be raised against it; and even appear in its highest magnificence, when both the world and the works of it are fallen to ruin.

Meanwhile every good man will surely desire, that the joyful period may come, when all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, shall be put into the full and undisturbed possession of this most valuable of all their rights: when the spirit of imposition shall totally retire from the world; or at least only lurk in the gloomy hearts of few, as a beast

of prey in the caverns of the earth, not daring to approach the habitations of men: when, in a word, the scales shall fall from the eyes of superstition, and persecution drop her iron rod; so that every Christian shall have liberty to pay his devout acknowledgments to his Father, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, according to the dictates of his own conscience, without the least restraint in his heavenly employ!

C H A P T E R II.

Arguments to prove the Christian's right.

SUCH then, as mentioned in the preceding chapter, are the general grounds of the right I contend for; and I presume they will be found sufficient to support it. In order however to confirm so interesting an object, and to evince that every Christian is actually invested with such a right, I will adduce a few plain, familiar arguments, drawn immediately from the original records of Christianity; which consequently, I should imagine, will be of weight with all who regard those records, and be admitted as decisive and positive proof.

It will be almost superfluous, I suppose, to say that by the original records of Christianity I mean the New Testament particularly, the

only source whence all the privileges, as well as the duties, peculiar to a Christian must be derived, or they will be often falsely, and always precariously, established. Up to this source then, which lies open to all, I would intreat my readers to take the pains to go; and I flatter myself that by all who do this, the following arguments will be both understood and approved.

SECTION I.

THE first argument I shall make use of, in order to evince the right I have specified, is founded on that plain declaration of Jesus, whereby he expressly *prohibits* his disciples from submitting their consciences to the authority of men. *Call no man your father upon the earth; for one is your FATHER who is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your MASTER, even Christ.* (Matt. 23. 9, 10.)

Now our Lord does not, certainly, forbid the use of those appellations, father and master, to children and servants; since such a prohibition would be directly subversive of that obedience and reverence which he elsewhere inculcates, as being justly due from these inferiors to those their superiors. We must then look out for another sense of the words: and I think the most obvious, the

most natural, and by consequence the only genuine meaning, is this : Beware that the obedience and reverence which are due from you to your earthly parents and masters in *civil* concerns, do not influence you to obey and reverence them as your guides and dictators in *religious* matters : but in whatever relates to your conscience and religion, ever remember that there is one, and *only* one, Supreme Authority, to which you should manifest an implicit submission.

From this single declaration then it evidently appears, that so far as we obey the authority of men in matters of religion, so far we detract from the authority of Christ ; and, in reality, are prostituting our noblest powers, which ought to be yielded to him alone. For, it should ever be remembered, that Jesus spoke this in direct opposition to the assumed authority of the Jewish rabbies, in deciding questions of their law ; so that he expressly prohibits his disciples from ever obeying such authority.

Obedience indeed, in all matters of this kind, to any authority less than divine, is absolute slavery ; whereby the mind is fettered, and wholly deprived of its noblest liberty. And I may add, that, as there is no tyranny equally odious to God as tyranny over the conscience ; so there is no slavery equally ignominious to man as a forced religion, or a

worship imposed on him by the fear of outward inconveniences. Till therefore this requisition of your Divine Master, Christians, be superseded,—till it be made appear that there is some *other* lawgiver to the Christian church besides the Lord Jesus Christ (which I believe will never be done) your right to judge on whatever is proposed to you by fallible men, and to act conformably to the dictates of conscience, will remain impregnable against every assailant.

To advance a step further in this argument : Does not this declaration of Christ plainly imply, that the right of liberty in matters of conscience, ought to be considered as absolutely *unalienable* ? *ONE is your Master*. The plain meaning of which declaration is, My disciples shall have no *other* master but Me, nor submit their consciences to *any* authority but Mine alone. Being My servants, My will, and not another's, ought to be considered by them as the rule of their behaviour : nor can any of them prescribe either the faith or duty of another, without assuming an unlawful dominion.

Equally impossible undoubtedly it is, in this, as in any other instance, to serve *two* masters whose commands are opposite ; and both of whom expect a prompt compliance with what they enjoin. Whenever then the voice of human authority requires subjection

to its decrees, the Christian should never forget, that a voice far more authoritative than any human one, calls for his submission to a superior and contrary mandate. Nay even supposing the voice of human authority should coincide with the voice of Christ (which is the most favourable supposition that can be made, as in fact it rarely takes place) yet in that case, though the man who implicitly obeyed it would indeed *profess* what is right, he certainly would *do* what is palpably wrong, and be highly criminal in the sight of God. The reason of this is obvious : such a procedure is to exalt *human* authority into the place of *divine*, and declaring, in fact, that man ought to be obeyed rather than God. Whereas, *ONE is our Father* who is in heaven ; who has an unalienable right to our entire obedience, which we cannot deprive him of and continue innocent, as we thereby rob him of his just dominion.

Make a proper distinction, therefore, Christians, between the rights which the powers of this world may justly claim, and the rights which peculiarly belong to God ; since a clear distinction may certainly be made. Civil magistrates, by virtue of their office, are entitled both to our regard and our tribute, as far as they are *the ministers of God for good*, and the necessary expences of

government require. Let these then be cheerfully and honourably given them. But, at the same time, ever remember that the rights of God are sacred and inviolable; and that he, alone, is the Lord of conscience, whose allegiance he claims as peculiarly his own. Whenever then those rights are invaded by any of the powers of this world, resolutely and perseveringly oppose such invaders; and never under any pretence yield that submission to men, which you believe is the unalienable property of God. Thus while on the one hand you cheerfully *render to Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's*, be no less solicitous that, on the other, you *render to God the things that are God's*.

SECTION II.

AS a further argument to prove the Christian's right to freedom of enquiry, I would observe, That the Lord Jesus Christ has absolutely *discharged* all His disciples, and particularly His ministers, from assuming an authority over the consciences of men, or even the faintest shadow of it. Others, says he, *love the uppermost rooms at feasts,---and to be called of men, RABBI, RABBI.* (Matt. 23. 6, 7.) They are fond of precedence, and pride themselves on their rank, or their airy titles of honour; in consequence of which they are so ar-

rogant as to expect an implicit submission to their decisions, and a prompt obedience to their mandates. Being vain enough to imagine themselves qualified as directors of conscience, they set themselves up for infallible guides, and would make their determinations an universal standard.

But, he adds, be not YE called Rabbi, neither be YE called Masters : never affect those flattering titles from men, much less assume so extravagant an authority ; and even if they should at any time be respectfully given you, value not yourselves on them, any further than as the appellations of an honourable office, which it is your duty, and ought to be your aim, to fill with credit to yourselves and advantage to those among whom you labour. But, then, never assume from those titles a power of enslaving the consciences of men, nor ever dictate to your fellow Christians with a tone of magisterial authority. On the contrary, *He that is greatest among you, shall be your servant :* so far from assuming or exercising a lordly dominion, or being ambitious to rule and oppress, the man who is truly the greatest among you, will be ready to wait on the rest, with all the condescension and assiduity of a servant. He will labour to enlighten, convince, and persuade you, by modestly producing the most forcible arguments, patiently unfolding the difficulties that occur,

and laying every thing as much as possible open to your view, so that you may be enabled to judge and act for yourselves, and *be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.*

Now these directions are evidently founded in consummate wisdom, and shew the author of them to be perfectly acquainted with human nature. For the love of power is one of those depraved principles, which operates strongly in the human breast. Accordingly, aspiring men in all ages, who have not been able to raise themselves to the seat of temporal dominion, and yet feeling this principle operate powerfully in their hearts, have used every effort to acquire a spiritual jurisdiction over the consciences of their brethren; and in many cases they have been by far too successful. But by such a procedure they evidently shew, that they have imbibed a portion at least of the spirit of Antichrist, whose character is delineated by the apostle, as *sitting in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.* (2 Thess. 2. 4.) For, I need not hesitate to affirm, that what power soever, Papal or Protestant (if such a power deserve the name of Protestant) assumes an authority over conscience, and would impose its decisions as the rule of faith or worship, is undoubtedly an usurper of Divine honours, and as such, bears the lineaments of the *man of sin.*

The apostles themselves, who of all others had surely the fairest claim to such an authority, plainly declared that they had no *dominion over the faith* of Christians, but were *helpers of their joy*. (2 Cor. i. 24.) When indeed they displayed their divine credentials,—when the lame walked, the blind saw, the dead returned to life, and the laws of nature were suspended,—the doctrine they taught, supported by such facts, as it laid a solid foundation for the faith of men, so it certainly claimed an absolute regard. But, after all, they left the final decision to every man himself, as the result of his personal conviction.

Whenever then a person, or a number of persons, of what description or character soever, claims an authority in religious matters, their claim is no less than an usurpation of the divine prerogative, and consequently must be highly criminal in the sight of God. Such a person, or collection of persons, is guilty of a direct breach of Christ's command; and therefore to enter a protest against so criminal a procedure, is justifiable and honourable both before God and men. If then all human pretensions to a jurisdiction over conscience be absolutely forbidden,—if the great Head of the church have positively discharged his subjects from preferring any claims of so imperious a nature, the right of free enquiry follows of course, as

the duty and privilege of every Christian.— Should any still think, that the obedience to Magistrates which the scripture enjoins, is incompatible with free enquiry, or an open profession, especially when restraining laws are enacted ;—I would wish such persons to consider, that the subjection to the higher powers which the New Testament inculcates on Christians, relates only to *civil*, and not at all to *religious*, matters. The reason of this is no less obvious than important : the magistrate, at the first propagation of Christianity, and for some centuries afterwards, was every where Pagan ; by consequence, had his edicts respecting religion been obeyed, the gospel could neither have been preached nor professed, but must have been stifled in its very birth. The truth is, neither our Lord nor the apostles ever either gave themselves, or exhorted others to give, any obedience to earthly powers in the affairs of religion : but, on the contrary, taught them to renounce and disavow it ; and in this respect to be obedient to God and not to men.

To what has been observed, respecting the criminality of prescribing to the consciences of others, as it is a manifest invasion of Christ's prerogative, and robbing him of one of his brightest jewels ; I may add, that it is no less iniquitous in another view. For, is not such a procedure a plain declaration, that he is not

wise enough to direct the consciences of his own disciples, in all things necessary for them to be acquainted with? Does not this spirit of imposition clearly indicate, that the rule which he has left us is, in some respects at least, defective; and that those defects are to be supplied by the superior wisdom of such persons, who call themselves his disciples and followers? How hateful then must an intolerant spirit appear in the eye of our Divine Redeemer! What sincere lover of the truth can forbear wishing, That the *Lord would give commandment concerning such a spirit, that no more of its name be sown: and that he would make its grave, for it is vile!* (Nah. i. 14.)

SECTION III.

THE apostles, again, in all their writings, give it in charge to the persons they address, to examine what is proposed to them with the greatest freedom. Their language accordingly is to this effect: *PROVE all things: hold fast that which is good.* (1 Theff. 5. 21.) *Beloved, believe not every spirit, but TRY the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.* (1 Joh. 4. 1.) *If there come any to you, and bring not the DOCTRINE OF CHRIST, receive him not into your house, neither bid him GOD SPEED.* (2 Joh. 10.)

Now, What is the basis on which those exhortations, and several others of a similar import, are founded? Is it not evidently the right that every Christian has to judge for himself, of the truth or falsity of the various doctrines that may be proposed to him by his fellow-men? Do they not at first sight plainly suggest this idea to the mind? The fact appears to me to be this: the apostles could say with propriety, both of themselves and their doctrine, *WE are of God; he that knoweth God, heareth us; he that is not of God, heareth not us.* And with equal propriety they could add, *Hereby know we the Spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.* (1 Joh. 4. 6.) The miracles they wrought were incontestible proofs of this, and consequently claimed an implicit subjection to their doctrines.

But surely none in this day, except in the height of arrogance, can adopt the apostle's language, and affirm, *Those who do not hear us are not of God, but are under the influence of an erroneous spirit!* Ill does it become fallible men, worse still does it become Protestants, and worst of all Protestant Dissenters, who are every day sacrificing to religious liberty, to assume a dictatorial air in matters of religion, as though they were invested with apostolic authority. If, indeed, such dictators could open the eyes of the blind, raise by a word the emaciated paralytic to his

wanted strength, or call back the dead to life, it must be owned they would then have credentials sufficient to support them: yet even in that case, the apostles, as has been observed, did not exercise such an authority, but left every one to form his own judgment, according to the conviction produced in his mind.

Till, however, such credentials be produced, the Christian may and ought to ask such imposers, By what authority do you this? and Who gave you that authority? He may and ought to reason with such persons in some such manner as the following: The pure apostolic doctrine is faithfully recorded in the New Testament, to which I think it my duty implicitly to assent, and to receive with cordial affection. But before I can yield such an assent, or manifest such an affection, to the doctrines you propose, I must first try them by that infallible standard; and if, on that trial, I find them genuine, they shall at once meet with my most cordial approbation. Yet even in this case, I do not receive them on your authority, who are only uninspired fallible men; the authority of Christ alone is of weight with me, and I receive the doctrine as proceeding from Him, and bearing the sanction of his authority.

Thus may the Christian argue against all imposers and impositions; nor can they reply to him in a way of opposition, except

they directly oppose the apostles. Vain would it have been for those infallible writers to have exhorted their readers to *try the spirits*;—vain to have told them to *prove all things*, if both spirits and doctrines were not to be rejected, on their manifest disagreement with the Christian records. These apostolic charges then are a decisive proof, both that the persons addressed had a right of judging, and that it was their indispensable duty to make use of that right.

The claim indeed which many plead for, to make confessions of faith and require subscription to them, as a celebrated writer on this subject has observed, seems to indicate as if the New Testament were wholly lost, and the doctrines of it no way recoverable, except by scraps of tradition, or mutilated citations in some old books, which those imposters alone can have access to. Scarcely the least room is left to suppose, that the written gospel, exhibiting the very doctrine of Christ and his apostles, is still in being; much less that it is in a condition to be consulted by every man, who wishes to obtain information for himself. While, on the contrary, the fact is, that every Christian has, or may have, the rule of his faith and duty in his own possession; and as we have seen, is under the strictest obligation to search it, and to follow whatever he finds there, at the hazard of all that is dear to him in the world.

This then being the true state of the case,—the apostles having given it in charge to all the professed disciples of Christ, to examine with freedom whatever is proposed to them as religious truth, or duty, and every Christian having an infallible standard of this in his own possession ;—surely those persons who claim a blind submission from the people in such circumstances, must have imbibed a considerable quantity of an Antichristian spirit ; and those Christians who submit to the claim, or even acknowledge it, must both violate the rule of their duty and act prejudicially to their best interests. The man who is truly acquainted with the gospel, and actuated by the genuine spirit of it, if he sustain the character of a teacher, will not only allow, but encourage, nay even *urge* his hearers to prove all things and to try the spirits : and if he be in a private station, he will examine with care, judge with candour, and determine at all events to hold fast what is really good. As such a person wishes not to dictate to others, so neither will he submit to be enslaved by any. Nor can such a procedure be justly liable to censure, but rather is deserving of praise, as highly meritorious in its own nature ; since it is the natural result of a proper attention to those apostolic exhortations already quoted.

SECTION IV.

AN additional argument, moreover, to convince the right I am pleading for, may be deduced from those exhortations of scripture that relate to the *profession* of the Christian faith.—Of this kind the following may be considered as a specimen : *Earnestly* CONTEND *for the faith which was once delivered to the saints.* (Jude 3.) STAND FAST *in one spirit*—STRIVING TOGETHER *for the FAITH of the gospel.* (Phil. 1. 27.) STAND FAST *in the FAITH,* quit you like men, *be strong.* (1 Cor. 16. 13.)

It must be obvious to every intelligent reader, that the term *faith* in those several passages, means the pure doctrines of the gospel, including what ever relates to Christian worship, as opposed to error of every kind. Now this faith is a sacred deposit, which the Lord Jesus Christ hath committed to His servants, requiring them to keep, profess, and adorn it, even at the expence of their property and their lives. It is plainly their duty therefore, to exert themselves with courage in so important a cause ; to do what lies in their power in order to stem the torrent of infidelity and error ; and, at all events to preserve the truth in its genuine purity, and to propagate its doctrines among their fellow-men.

If then a Christian ought to *contend* for the faith, and *stand fast* in it, surely he must judge

for himself what that faith is, lest he contend for a shadow and lose the substance. Can it be thought that Christians will arrange themselves under the banner of Christ, to fight *the good fight, and keep the faith*, unless they be acquainted with the object they contend for? And how must such a knowledge be obtained? Must they derive it from *human* formularies, or implicitly contend for the creeds of others? Were this incumbent on them, their case would be truly pitiable. But the truth is, no such requisition is made in any part of the sacred writings; nor can that chapter, verse, or line, be produced, which contains the shadow of any such thing. Clearly then is the Christian's right to a free enquiry established, from this single consideration; and it will, I should imagine, appear reasonable to all, That if a Christian must stand fast in the faith, he must previously examine the several articles of which it consists.

Besides, as the preceding exhortations are addressed to particular societies of Christians, congregated according to Christ's appointment, they evidently imply, not only the right of free enquiry, but also of social worship, public instruction, and, in short, a right to take every method which such societies may judge the most eligible, for the extending of that kingdom which is *not of this world*. Not the least

intimation is given that those societies may relinquish their profession, or abstain from the duties required of them, because they are frowned on by their civil governors. On the contrary, they are exhorted not to be *terrified by their adversaries*, but rather to discover a strength and fortitude of mind equal to the conflict in which they are engaged : to quit themselves like men of invincible resolution, undismayed by the menaces of their most inveterate foes.

Some persons indeed there are, who have the moderation and good sense to admit the professors of Christianity to *think* for themselves in religious matters, and even to *profess* (in a restrictive manner) that mode of religion which their consciences the best approve of ; but then here they stop. They have not the generosity to admit of a fair and open appeal to the world, lest proselytes should be made, and the obnoxious sect be increased thereby. But might it not be of real use to such persons, particularly in its tendency to rectify their notions of this matter, were they to consider, That the first preachers and professors of the gospel never thought themselves under obligation to consult any earthly superior, relative to what they should preach, believe, profess, or practise ; but, in all these respects, were wholly regulated by a much higher authority ?

When John the Baptist, for example, the declared fore-runner of Christ, entered on his ministry, he began in the wilderness of Judea ; and the substance of his embassy to the people was, *Repent ye : for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* The character of this celebrated Reformer too, was perfectly adapted to the nature of his ministry. Bold, open, zealous, severe, he proclaimed wherever he came, that *Now the ax is laid to the root of the trees ; and added, Every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.* Great, accordingly, was the effect of his preaching : for we are told that *there went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.* (Matt. 3. 1—11.) Soon after, Jesus himself, as the great prophet of his church, opened his commission ; and exhorted men *to repent and believe the gospel.*—Afterwards, when he had called his disciples, and in some measure qualified them for so important a work, he commanded them *to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and to preach that the kingdom of heaven was at hand.* (Matt. 10. 1. &c.)

Now it is remarkable, and I think greatly in favour of the cause I am pleading, that neither John, nor Christ, nor the apostles, ever presented any petition either to the Roman Governors or the Jewish Sanhedrim, in order to ob-

tain *leave* to publish those important doctrines with which they were intrusted, and to erect that new kingdom of which they were professedly sent to be the founders. This procedure, in my view, amounts to a demonstration, that they had not even the most distant idea of the religion they taught interfering with the State, or making any alteration in the nature of Political society, or that the magistrate, as such, had any thing to do with it. For, had they entertained the least notion with regard to such an interference, would they not have applied to the Civil powers, or the Ecclesiastic, or both, relative to the execution of so important a plan?—Or, on the other hand, had they been in reality, what they were falsely represented to be, *pestilent* persons, and *movers of sedition*, would they not have taken similar measures with other seditious persons, in order to acquire the object they aimed at? Would they not have fought with the *sword* literally, as Jesus intimated to Pilate his servants would have done, had his kingdom been, like other kingdoms, *of this world*?

But, as they neither consulted with any earthly governours relative to the embassy in which they were engaged, nor ever attempted to enforce what they delivered by any worldly methods, may I not appeal to the breast of every honest man, Whether such a procedure be not a demonstrative proof, that those pri-

mitive founders of Christianity, considered it as the personal concern of each individual, and that there was no occasion to advise with any earthly superior with respect either to the propagation or the reception of it? The account we have of their procedure is plainly this: that it was their constant practise to preach the gospel to all persons promiscuously, wherever they came; and almost all the business they had with magistrates, seems to have been on occasion of their being brought before the Civil tribunal, on ill-founded and malicious charges being lodged against them.

Besides, it will I think give additional weight to the argument, if we take into the account the nature of those instructions which Christ gave his apostles, when he first sent them to publish the glad tidings of salvation; together with their punctuality in the observance of those instructions.—Frankly he warned them of the hardships, dangers, and sufferings, of various kinds, to which they would be exposed in the course of their ministry. *Behold, I send you forth as SHEEP in the midst of WOLVES; be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.* Though they were sent as the messengers of peace and the friends of mankind,—though their office was of the most benevolent nature, and their message worthy of the most cordial acceptance, he neverthe-

less informed them, that in consequence of the depraved dispositions and malignant passions of men, they should be exposed to the most inhuman severities, and become the objects of mortal animosity.

But were they to cease from their work on this account? By no means. The only liberty they had in this case was, if they were persecuted *in one city*, they might, were it in their power, *flee to another*. But, at all events, they were to persist in delivering their embassy, *not fearing them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fearing Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.* (Matth. 10. 16.--29.)

Now these instructions were not more explicitly given than they were punctually observed. A case in point (which I shall select out of a large number) we have in the example of Peter and John. When these two disciples were commanded by the Jewish rulers *not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus*, as they regarded their safety or even their lives: What did they do on that occasion? Were they restrained or intimidated by those menaces? Directly the reverse. Animated by undaunted fortitude, and a full persuasion both of the equity and importance of the cause they were engaged in, they immediately answered, *Whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken to you more than to God,*

judge ye. (Acts 4. 18.) An appeal which will equally serve a Protestant in a Popish country, or a Dissenter of any kind in a Protestant one.

From these premises then I need not hesitate to assert, that every disciple of Jesus has a right, not only to *profess* his religious opinions in his own way, but also to take every prudent method of *disseminating* them among those he is conversant with, as far as he has ability and opportunity, how opposite soever they may be to *the higher powers* in the place of his residence, or how much soever such a conduct may expose him to the displeasure of men in general.

The true professors of Christianity accordingly, have in every age been engaged in this arduous contest, and numbers of them have acquitted themselves with singular honour. Not all the flattering baits that have been laid in their way, nor the iron hand of persecution stretched out against them, could either draw them aside from the way of truth, or prevent their public profession of it.

This contention for the faith, too, further implies that the professors of Christianity have a right to expose the absurdities of a *false* religion, as well as to expatiate on the evidences and excellencies of their own. Nay it extends even further still: for, if the disciples of Christ must contend for the faith which

was *once delivered to the saints*, they must, of course, according to their ability, point out all the deviations from the *true religion*, and all the various corruptions of it which they perceive in the world ; otherwise How shall it be kept in its *primitive purity* ? Indeed for a man to defend himself, and to attack his adversary, are in many cases the same thing, since frequently the one cannot be done without the other ; and I am clearly of opinion that this, occasionally at least, is the duty of a Christian in the station he is placed in, and is even essential to his character as a soldier of Christ.

SECTION V.

ANOTHER argument I shall make use of on this occasion, is drawn from the high *commendations* that are so frequently given to those persons, who have examined with freedom and acted with firmness. — The Bereans, on this very account, have their character transmitted to posterity with honour, as a noble, ingenuous, or liberal-minded people, who neither received any thing implicitly, nor rejected it pertinaciously. *They searched the scriptures daily*, says the divine historian, *whether those things were so.* (Acts 17. 10. — 12.)

With what peculiar complacency too, the great Head of the church regards particular

churches, and particular persons, for their love to the truth, and their steady profession of it, is sufficiently manifest from the letters addressed to the once flourishing, but now desolated churches of Asia. Thus He addresses the church in Ephesus : *I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them that are evil ; and thou hast TRIED them who say they are apostles, and are not ; and hast found them liars.* In similar terms also, he speaks to the church in Pergamos ; *I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is ; and thou HOLDEST FAST my name, and hast NOT DENIED my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.* (Rev. 2. 2, and 13.)

Who can read with attention these declarations of our Lord, and not feel the weight of them in the cause I am pleading ? These churches are evidently commended, highly commended, for their close examination of the doctrines proposed to them, and their rejection of those that appeared to be spurious. They are commended too for a practice correspondent to the above, in rejecting the *persons* who propogated the doctrines, as well as the doctrines those persons propogated. Had the two churches specified been equally careful in after ages, to guard

themselves against the venom which false teachers and false professors diffused among them, they would not have died of a lingering disease.

Every Christian therefore undoubtedly has a right, with prudence and meekness to attempt the reformation of that church he is a member of, in all those instances wherein he apprehends a reform is necessary; and if such a reform cannot be obtained, if the church notwithstanding his modest remonstrances, continue to profess what he apprehends to be erroneous doctrines, or to practise uninstituted rites, on every principle of reason and scripture he will stand justified both in the sight of God and of men, in separating from such a church and joining a purer one: or, if that cannot be effected, in attempting the erection of a new one, where scriptural doctrines may be openly professed, and scriptural worship be openly celebrated. None, I hope, will construe this assertion, as tho' it were designed to countenance a proud, pragmatical, turbulent party-man, who would disturb the peace of a church by his own lordly impositions, and assume an authority which by no means belongs to him. So far from pleading the cause of such persons, I deem them to be *heretics*, in the scripture sense of that word, and as such to be first plainly admonished, and if they persist in their con-

duct totally rejected. The cause I plead is, the right of the modest, peaceable, conscientious Christian, who differs from others in (what he esteems at least) matters of importance, openly to profess his religion in his own way, according to the judgment that he himself has formed from the only authentic standard of it.

Now this right, I think, is fairly deducible from the before-mentioned premises. For, if those persons who *rejected* the false apostles and their doctrine, be commended for their practice;—if those who *held fast* the doctrine of Christ, notwithstanding the violent attempts to wrest it from them, be approved of God; it will inevitably follow, that they had a right to engage in such a procedure.—One would think it matter of astonishment indeed, that ever a Protestant should oppose this principle, since it is the only basis on which Protestantism stands. But the frequency of the opposition abates the surprize. We may however affirm, that there is a strange inconsistency in such an opposition, as the Reformation itself, with all its glorious consequences, can be vindicated only by arguments like this. For, if any body of men, Civil or Ecclesiastic, have a lawful power to restrain the propagation of truth, or of supposed truth, in matters purely religious, then all reformation is entirely at an end. It

would indeed be absolutely unjustifiable : since in every country where there is an established religion, there will always be found a set of men who claim an authority to support it ; by consequence, if their power be derived from God, if they can produce divine credentials for so high a claim, any opposition to them would be highly criminal.

But the right of a man, or of any body of men, of what description soever, to judge for others in matters of religion, is, like the *divine right* of kings, which was formerly talked of, only a chimera ; it is founded neither in reason nor in scripture, in argument or in utility. Wherever therefore a jurisdiction of this kind is claimed or exercised, it is a manifest usurpation, and as such ought ever to be steadily opposed. Every Protestant particularly, who has a proper regard for the religion he professes, should take a decided part in such an opposition : he should resolutely disavow all jurisdiction over conscience, by whatever power it may be assumed ; and abstain from every compliance with the requisitions of men, which may be construed as an acknowledgment of the justice of the claim.

The major part of men indeed, wanting either time, or inclination, or ability, seldom examine into the nature of such things, but draw a conclusion principally, if not wholly,

from the event. Hence in religious, as well as in civil matters, the *right* has been almost inseparably connected with the *issue*. For, as in the latter, a successful attempt to maintain the liberty of a people, has been termed a Revolution, an unsuccessful one a Rebellion, and the persons engaged in it treated as traytors to their king and country; so in the former, a successful opposition to an over-bearing hierachy has been denominated a Reformation, an unsuccessful one a Heresy, and the persons concerned in it punished as infamous, with all the wantonness of inquisitorial barbarity.

But, I presume, it is neither the success, nor the want of success, in any such attempt, that should induce us to denominate it right or wrong; since it certainly is either the one or the other, independent of all events. For surely it is not the censure which any tyrannical rulers, civil or ecclesiastic, may fix on any laudable attempt, that can make the attempt itself less glorious. Hence the lovers of civil liberty, in all ages, have unanimously applauded those who have run the greatest risks in order to maintain it; and the name of a Russel, or a Sidney, in our own country particularly, will be held in high estimation so long as a spark of liberty is found to exist. Hence too the lovers of religious liberty, have equally revered the memory of those who have

firmly supported the rights of conscience ; and the name of a Wickliffe, or a Hufs, will be had in everlasting honour.

SECTION VI.

THE only other argument I shall use on this occasion, is the solemn account every Christian must personally give, at the *judgment of the great day*.—A day, a solemn period is fixed, by the unalterable counsels of heaven, in which God will judge the world in righteousness, by that Man whom he hath ordained. The Lord Jesus Christ is invested with this high authority of executing judgment, because he became obedient to death. Accordingly we are expressly and repeatedly informed in sacred writ, *that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.*

The Rule of judgment, we are further informed, will be, not the laws of any of the Potentates or Powers of this world, but the laws of him who is *King of kings, and Lord of lords*. Not that we are to imagine the rule will be exactly the same to all : this will by no means be the case. Heathens, Jews, and Christians, will severally be judged, according to the different intimations which God

has given them of his nature and of his will. Every one, in short, that ever did, or ever shall inhabit this globe, as a rational agent, from Adam its first inhabitant, down to those that shall be found alive at the second appearance of Christ, will be judged according to the light that God has afforded him to know his duty.

If then it be a fact that God will judge the world by the above-mentioned rule, and not by any human law whatever, then it follows as a necessary consequence, that every law made by the powers of this world, which is contrary to the law of God, is iniquitous in the first instance, and a servile compliance with it is at the risk of our final condemnation. Were a Christian who is an Englishman, for instance, to be judged hereafter by the ecclesiastical laws of England, then it would undoubtedly be both his duty and his interest to manifest a cheerful submission to those laws, and to make them the rule of his temper and conduct. But if, when such a person closes the present scene of life, he can derive no further privileges from the laws of England;—if in the future world these laws be wholly disregarded, and *something else* be substituted as the rule of judgment, then surely such laws can never be the rule of his duty here, but he must have a right to regulate his conduct by a superior law, even though it should

be in direct contradiction to these. The plain truth indeed is, that the earthly power who prescribes laws for the direction of conscience, and the man who obeys such laws, both do it on peril of the divine displeasure.

Every Christian then, whether he live in England, France, or Spain,—in Europe, Asia, Africa, or America, will be finally acquitted or condemned by the laws contained in the New Testament only, since these are the intimations of the will of God to him in particular. Now the substance of the Christian law is this : *if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.* (Rom. 10. 9, 10.) This *confession* with the mouth undoubtedly includes in it the whole of a Christian's obedience, and is as essentially necessary to the enjoyment of salvation as *believing with the heart*. For, unless such a profession of Christianity be maintained, a secret conviction of its truth would rather increase our condemnation. The final sentence indeed, will be founded on a compliance or non-compliance with the above requisition, as is clear from numberless passages of the Christian revelation. Out of these I shall at present select only one ; but it is one which methinks no professed

disciple of Christ should ever lose sight of. *Whosoever*, says the Sovereign Lord of conscience and of life, *shall* "CONFESS me before men, him will I CONFESS also before my Father who is in heaven. But *whosoever shall* DENY me before men, him will I also DENY before my Father who is in heaven. (Matt. 10. 32, 33.)

Now the man who sincerely believes this declaration of Jesus, will surely adhere to his cause, manifest a regard to his worship, and walk in the prescribed path of duty, though such a procedure be attended with the greatest worldly disadvantages. Such a person will often have reflections like these :
" What are all the profits, the pleasures, and
" the honours which men can bestow, when
" compared with the glory, the honour, and
" the immortal happiness which the Lord will
" confer on all his servants ! And what is all
" the pain, vexation, and misery, which the
" world can inflict, when compared with that
" everlasting infamy and misery, which shall
" hereafter be inflicted on those who relin-
" quish their profession through the menaces
" of men ! " Animated by such considera-
tions, the sincere disciple of Jesus *takes up*
his cross, and follows his Divine Master in
the path of duty, at the hazard of all that
is dear to him in the world.

If such as these then be the requisitions of the Christian Legislator, must not every subject of his have a right to observe them? And if every Christian be personally concerned in these requisitions, -- if his eternal happiness or misery depend on his observance or non-observance of them, who ought to judge of the nature and extent of them but himself alone? Surely it must appear obvious to all, that if no earthly power whatever can acquit me in the great day of accounts, no such power ought to restrain me in any part of my conduct here, which has a sole respect to the future world. Could it indeed be made appear, that the injunctions of earthly powers, even if attended with pains and penalties, would be admissible at the great tribunal as a sufficient reason why the Christian should refrain from some branches of his duty, then, I allow, the interference of those powers in religious matters might be admitted. But, if we have not the least shadow of reason to suppose, that any plea of this kind will be at all available; -- if Nebuchadnezzar's command to the three Hebrew youths, though enforced with the threatening of immediate death, would not have exculpated them from the sin of idolatry, in paying homage to his golden god, then certainly every Christian must have the right of self-direction, in whatever relates to his

conscience and religion ; and it will be on peril of the divine displeasure if he ever give up the exercise of the right.

S E C T I O N VII.

ON the whole, then, if scripture be allowed to determine for us in this important affair (and what judge will a Protestant appeal to but scripture) the case I think is clearly decided. For, if Christians be commanded to call no man Master on earth, — if the Lord Jesus Christ have absolutely discharged all his disciples from ever assuming an authority over conscience, — if the apostles give it in charge to the persons they address, to examine what is proposed to them with the greatest freedom, — if every Christian must contend for the faith, and stand fast in it, — if those are highly commended who have examined with freedom and acted with firmness, — and if, finally, every Christian must give a personal account at the judgment of the great day, every such person must have the liberty of self-direction, nor ought he to be under the restraint of any.

Nothing, in my apprehension, can be more evident, than that every Christian has a right invested in him by divine authority, to search the scriptures and determine for himself; and if he find just cause, to dissent from any or all the human formularies on earth. This,

too, is a right which he cannot transfer, either to any church, or any particular person, because it his indispensable duty to exercise it personally for himself. To which I will add, that this liberty which is invested in the disciples of Jesus, by credentials of indisputable authority, can never be taken from them, or even so much as abridged, by any earthly power whatever, except that power be guilty of manifest injustice. For, if the arguments adduced on this subject have any weight in them, then all intolerance in religious matters, — every attempt to force the consciences of men, stands in direct opposition to the primary principles of Christianity, and in defiance of the most express precepts of its Divine Founder.

The patrons of human authority may indeed produce their canons, and traditions, and legends, in order to give strength and plausibility to their cause ; but all these will vanish, like the morning cloud before the sun, when confronted by the original records of the rights and privileges of Christian men. Away then with all decrees and determinations of councils and synods, — away with all the confessions, agreements, and declarations of men ; and let every Christian embrace and defend only that most valuable form of sound words contained in the scriptures, which was indited by the Holy Spirit

himself, and able to make men wise to salvation. This will give due honour to the sacred writings, and is making that use of them for which they were originally intended ; whereas, by a contrary procedure, their glory is eclipsed, and in a great measure hidden from the eyes of men.

C H A P T E R III.

Motives to enforce the Exercise of the Christian's Right &c.

PERMIT me now, Christians, to urge some Motives, with a view to enforce the Exercise of a right, so firmly invested in you by scripture authority.

It has appeared surprizing to me, that a right so valuable and important in itself, and so advantageous and honourable in its consequences, should be so little esteemed, and so faintly exercised, by the generality of Christian professors. But, when I consider the indolence of some, the rooted prejudices of others, and the love of ease and reputation which more or less is natural to all, my surprize at their conduct in a great measure abates. Still however some interesting questions may be asked, which I think deserve to be seriously attended to. Ought those things to be so ? Should not a Christian, at all events, both examine with attention the

rule of his religion, and conform himself to it in every particular? Does it become a subject of Christ's kingdom, on any consideration whatever, to bow his conscience to human authority? If I am not greatly mistaken, these questions carry a decisive answer along with them: should some persons however think otherwise as to this, if they will consider attentively the following hints, it is hoped that then they will see reason to agree with me.

S E C T I O N I.

CONSIDER then, first of all, whether the oath of allegiance you have taken to Christ, as the only supreme Head and King in spiritual matters, does not lay you under the strongest obligations, to enter your protest against every usurper? Should any foreign prince, for instance, prescribe laws to you, and require obedience to his injunctions, you would I imagine think the allegiance you owe to his present Majesty King George III, a sufficient reason to enter a protest against such laws, and to refuse obedience to such injunctions. Infinitely greater reason assuredly there is, why you should reject a foreign power in spiritual matters than in temporal; since the obligations you are under to the Prince of life, rise infinitely higher than those you are under to any earthly sovereign, even

though he were the Father of his people. Whoever is a Christian in reality, has made an unreserved surrender of himself to Christ, to be at his disposal and to do his will. Such a person, to speak in prophetic language, has *subscribed with his hand to the Lord*, and *sworn to the Lord of hosts*. (Isaiah. 44. 5. and 19. 18.) The answer therefore that may be given by the Christian to every religious imposer, is no less obvious than forcible: "My allegiance to another, and a much higher power, in all the affairs of conscience, absolutely forbids my subjection to you; and I appeal to your own breast, whether I ought not *to obey God rather than men?*"

More forcible still should this motive be, with all those who, in the most unequivocal manner, have testified their loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ, by being voluntarily baptized in his Name. For the primary design of that evangelic rite, as appears from the view which the New Testament gives of it, is, An explicit and personal subjection to the authority of Christ, as the only Redeemer and King of his church. Every baptized Christian therefore, in consequence of his own voluntary engagements, is under peculiar obligations to regard solely the authority of his ascended Lord, and resolutely to disclaim every other jurisdiction. The Corin-

thian converts accordingly, when rent into parties by their attachment to different teachers, had a sharp reproof given them in this question, *Were ye baptized in the name of Paul?* A plain intimation, or rather a cogent argument, that they ought not to have been influenced by any authority besides His, who is the only Lawgiver in the Christian church. If we have been baptized into His Name, certainly His laws, and not those of any other teacher; — His faith, and not the articles of any society; — His authority, and not the assumed power of any man or body of men, should ever be owned by us as binding on conscience.

If then Christians ye have *put on* Christ in baptism, — if ye have, as it were, sworn allegiance to him as your only Lawgiver, — if, in a word, ye have publickly professed yourselves to be his loyal subjects, ought ye not to enter your protest against all pretenders, and renounce their claims as unjustly founded? What! can any baptized Christian own another master besides Him whose name he wears! Can he be subject to another king besides the King of saints, the Lord of glory! Let him rather at once renounce the Christian name, and relinquish his Christian profession, since he acts in a manner so highly inconsistent with them, and lays his religion under so great a disgrace!

Disloyalty to a wise, virtuous, and merciful prince, has something in its nature peculiarly odious; and the greater the blessings are which we enjoy from his sceptre, the stronger must our obligations be to reverence and esteem him. If this be true with respect to an earthly governour,—if an opposition to a prince possessed of those amiable and princely qualities be branded with infamy, and held in detestation by the wisest and best of mankind; what shall be said of those who are disloyal to the Prince of peace, who set up another authority in opposition to his, or who yield subjection to a different sceptre? Such a duplicity, or rather criminality of conduct, in any of the professed subjects of Christ's kingdom, which is governed in wisdom, righteousness, and mercy, must assuredly be deserving of a severe animadversion. Can it be thought that the Great Emmanuel, who is so infinitely deserving of our highest regard, will pass over with impunity so ungrateful and perfidious a procedure! Will he not rather say, *Those mine enemies who would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me?*

Should not these considerations then, induce all the disciples of Jesus to maintain inviolably their allegiance to him, and to hold in disdain every insidious proposal, that

would tend to engage them in an opposition to his kingdom? Delivered by his hand from the fetters of slavery, and brought to enjoy so benign an administration, ought ye not, Christians, to stand fast in the liberty he hath invested you with, and resolutely maintain it against every opposer?

SECTION II.

ANOTHER motive I would urge on this occasion, is, The salutary influence such an enquiry will have on the mind, by producing and cherishing a cordial love to the truth, on account of its native, intrinsic beauty.—Easy it were to prove, that submitting to the decisions of human authority in matters of faith, is always prejudicial to true religion, and sometimes totally subversive of it. For, in proportion as we bow to the authority of men, in any affairs of this kind, truth loses her charms and her influence over us: we become blind to her brightest characters, and are prepared to be led into the most absurd superstitions.

When once we resign ourselves to the guidance of human authority, and give up the free exercise of our own understandings in religious concerns, we may readily, and perhaps almost insensibly, be led to comply with the greatest corruptions of religion. Illustrations

tive of this I may ask, What will that man refuse to engage in, who servilely bows himself to the will of another? What errors so palpable that he will not embrace, or what superstition so gross that he will not live in the observance of? Such a conduct is undoubtedly the bane of every virtuous principle, and subversive of that love of the truth, which discriminates the Christian from other men. It is, in effect, a renunciation of the religion of Christ, and seems wholly incompatible with genuine Christianity. For *he* only can with any degree of propriety be called a Christian, who derives his religion from what Christ has taught; and so far only as he does this, can that appellation properly belong to him.

If however we speak in the softest terms, and allow such a procedure to be compatible with Christianity, still we must affirm, That where the authority of Christ is departed from in any instance, in *that respect* at least, such persons are not Christians, but ought to be distinguished by some other name. They may be Calvinists, they may be Lutherans, they may be members of the Church-of-England, or of any other church; but in *that particular* they certainly do not act conformably to the precepts of Christianity. Besides, such a conduct stifles that high regard for the truth which ought ever to characterise the

disciples of Christ : it draws a veil over her brightest charms, and tends to extinguish an attachment to her ; an attachment which, wherever it exists, is at once both the ornament and the evidence of the Christian character.

Every attentive reader of the New Testament will easily recollect, what a great stress is laid, in various parts of that sacred book, on paying a proper regard to the *truth*. Those, for instance, who are chosen to salvation, are appointed to obtain that important object, through *the belief of the truth*. — All who are born of 'God, are begotten *with the word of truth*, and have *the truth* dwelling in them : nor can any man, with the least shadow of evidence from scripture, lay a claim to so high a relation, but those who *know* and *love the truth*. Besides, divine truth is powerfully influential on the Christian's progress in the spiritual life, and will greatly accelerate that progress, when properly understood, received, and obeyed. Those indeed and those only, who are properly acquainted with divine truth, make any proficiency in true sanctification, as is clear from that single petition of our Lord's, *Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth*. (John 17. 17.)

Whatever therefore has a tendency to cherish this love, must be an object of

considerable importance ; and as such, ought diligently to be pursued by every Christian. Now it is not, I apprehend, any difficult matter to evince, that above all other things, a free, diligent, and unbiaſſed enquiry has ſuch a tendency, and will actually terminate in the attainment of ſo deſirable an object. Freedom of enquiry, unfettered by a proſtituted conſcience, and unchecked by the apprehenſion of conſequences, as the hiſtory of all ages proves, will produce its natural offspring, truth ; and truth has charms, that require only to be ſeen and known, in order to recommend her to the acceptance of all. So great indeed and real are the beauties of divine truth, that the more cloſely ſhe is examined, the more clearly will thoſe beauties appear ; by conſequence the more powerfully will the heart be attracted towards her, as every way worthy of our higheſt regard.

Befides, this intimacy (if I may ſo expreſs it) with divine truth, like other connections with the wiſe and the virtuous, will naturally mould the mind into a reſemblance of her ; ſo that its regard for her will, of courſe, be daily increaſing. To which I may add, that piety, charity, integrity, humility, with all the bright train of Chriſtian graces, will voluntarily aſſociate themſelves with ſo amiable an object, and own her as their genuine, illuſtrious parent. The man who forms his

notions, and regulates his conduct by the Christian code, will be taught to exercise forbearance, meekness, gentleness, and universal benevolence. And though he may think it his duty, according to the ability which God hath given him, to contend even *earnestly* for the purity of the gospel faith and worship, yet such a contention, conducted in the exercise of those amiable dispositions, will always tend both to the discovery of truth and the increase of love. It will tend to throw light on every object it relates to, whereby the beauty and importance of such objects will be seen, and the heart more powerfully attracted towards them.

If then, Christians, the conduct I am enforcing will be productive of such salutary consequences, ought it not to be an object you should never lose sight of? Nay ought it not to be attended to with the greatest assiduity? *Search the scriptures* therefore, as the laborious miner searches for the ore, and doubt not of being amply compensated for your pains. *Buy the truth*, in this manner, *and sell it not*: but rather let the men of this world know, that there are some things which cannot be obtained for money.

S E C T I O N III.

SUCH an impartial enquiry after religious truth, as I am now recommending, together with an open and steady profession of it, will likewise have a tendency to prevent the erection of an Ecclesiastical tyranny,—to preserve Christianity in its native purity,—and consequently to promote the interest and happiness of succeeding generations.

Every one who is conversant in Church history, must have observed, that from the time when Christianity became a national establishment, under the auspices of Constantine, a tyranny has been erected over the consciences of men. Still more evident is it, to what a height this tyranny was carried, by the assiduity, fraud, and power, of the Roman Pontiffs; so that in some ages its claims were so exorbitant, and so evidently incompatible with the essential rights and liberties of mankind, as to enact that no man might even so much as *buy and sell*, unless in all religious concerns he yielded implicit submission. (Rev. 13. 17.)

At length, however, this despotic hierarchy, in the wantonness of power, became so exceedingly oppressive, and executed its edicts in so cruel a manner, that the yoke could no longer be patiently borne. The foundation of church authority was carefully investigated,

by some whose minds were roused from their lethargy, and it was found to consist wholly of sand. Boldly therefore was it attacked, and the enormous fabric, almost in an instant, tottered on its base; nor could its total destruction have been prevented, had not the civil powers been called in, and exerted themselves strenuously in its defence. Now it is well known, from long experience, that the edicts of princes, or acts of parliament, seconded by a military force, have a much greater and more certain effect on men, than the Christians weapons of reason and argument; consequently the attack was not attended with all that success, which its friends and abettors had ardently wished for. Some of the outworks however were carried, and have to this day been possessed by the assailants. But here, alas, the matter ended! Those champions in the cause of liberty, could not, or at least did not, make that use of their victory which might reasonably have been expected. Too easily were they prevailed on to erect other fabricks, in many respects resembling that they had stormed, which after a time became almost as formidable to others, as that had formerly been to them.

The Reformation was indeed attended with many very interesting and important advantages, tho' not with all that were either wished or expected. Human authority still, armed

with the sanction of law, and attended with worldly emoluments, by its threatnings or allurements, induces numbers to bow the knee ; and so long as those penalties and emoluments are held out to men, many will continue to be influenced by them. This pernicious principle of judging for other men, and domineering over their consciences, in whatever way it be maintained, has always been, is now, and ever will be, the greatest obstruction to all reformation, and utterly inconsistent with an honest and free enquiry after the truth. Now who are the persons the most likely to oppose this authority, and to bear a firm and undaunted testimony against it ? Not surely those who agree to support it ; but men of different principles and of a different conduct.

A celebrated historian, speaking of the way in which *civil* liberty, under a monarchical government, must be preserved from degenerating into despotism, hath observed That “ the influence of the clergy, in an “ age of superstition, might be usefully employed to assert the rights of mankind : but, “ he adds, such is the connection between the “ throne and the altar, that the banner of the “ church has very seldom been seen on the “ side of the people. A martial nobility and “ stubborn commons, possessed of arms, tena-

“cious of property, and collected into constitutional assemblies, form the only barrier which can perpetually resist the perpetual enterprizes of an aspiring prince.”

Now if the banner of the church (that is an established church) has very seldom been seen on the side of the people, with respect to their *civil* liberty, has it not still more seldom appeared on that side in behalf of their *religious* liberty? Nay would it not even seem, from the above-mentioned connection, that it is *never* to be expected there? Men of an independent spirit then, who *think* and *act* for themselves, unrestrained by fear, and unallured by wordly emoluments; men possessed of scripture truth and gospel liberty, tenacious of so invaluable a possession, and who are collected into distinct assemblies for the profession and propagation of it; men, in short, who consider themselves as *citizens of heaven*, and who in consequence of that, express a generous contempt of the pleasures and pains which the world may hold out to them, with a view to engage them from the path of their duty; — *these* are the persons who form the only barrier, which can prevent the erection of an ecclesiastical tyranny; or restrain the hand of ambition from drawing its chains over both the actions and the minds of men. Now to prevent this is certainly an object of great importance, since *ecclesiastical*

despotism is much more detestable in its nature, and pernicious in its consequences, than any *civil* tyranny whatsoever; and I believe the experience of all ages will evince, that so long as the prospect and example of freedom are before the eyes of men, they will wear the chains of slavery with much greater reluctance.

Besides, such a procedure is not only a barrier against the encroachments of despotism, it is also a preservative of Christianity in its primitive state, and of course will be conducive to the interest and happiness of succeeding generations. In the scriptures, religion is delineated as she descended from heaven, arrayed in her native purity; but by a long residence on earth, among a weak and degenerate race of beings, she has contracted a considerable mixture of error and corruption. So great indeed is the change she has undergone, that what is now in various parts of the world called Christianity, scarcely bears the most distant resemblance to her, which originally came down from heaven; so that were men to form their judgment of the doctrines and worship which Jesus and his apostles have taught, from what they see and hear of those matters in several countries which bear the appellation of Christian, their rejection of Christianity could not be surprizing. Rather, is it not surprizing that *thinking* men

should ever imagine such absurdities to be of divine appointment ? *

It is an enquiry of great importance, therefore, How this alteration has been effected ; since a knowledge of the cause, or causes, which contributed to produce such a change, will of course throw considerable light on the means to be made use of as a future preservative.

Now it cannot, I think, be in the least doubted of by any, who are acquainted with the history of mankind, that the ambition of the human heart, prompting men to domineer over the consciences of others, and to impose their own mandates as the rule of faith, has been the capital source of all the corruptions, superstitions, and errors, which have so greatly

* There is a remarkable instance of this, with regard to the Jews, in the Harleian Miscellany ; the substance of which is as follows : About three hundred of their Rabbies, called together from several parts of the world, assembled in the year 1650, in the plain of Ageda in Hungary, to examine the scriptures with a view to solve this question, Whether Christ be already come, or whether they may yet expect his coming. Among other objects of their enquiry, in order to obtain a solution of their difficulty, this was one : If Christ be come, what rules and orders hath he left his church to walk by ? As they would not consult the New Testament on this occasion, they required some other instruction. Accordingly fix

defaced the Christian religion. This spirit of imposition constitutes a principal part of that *mystery of iniquity*, which began to work in the apostolic age, but did not attain its full height till several centuries afterwards, when by gradual advances it at last was established on the ruins of Christianity.

In the eight century, the church of Rome attained her highest grandeur, when *the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication*. (Rev. 17. 2.) If it be asked, How so astonishing a fabric as this was erected? The answer is equally obvious and important: The usurped dominion over men's consciences, claimed and exercised by that church, is the basis on which it rests; and the egregious folly of the people, in submitting to that dominion, has added strength and permanency to it.

of the Romish Clergy (who had been purposely sent thither by the Pope) being admitted into the council, opened to them the rules and doctrine of the church of Rome; which they affirmed to be the very doctrine of Christ, and the very rules that the apostles had left to the church. But on hearing that the Pope is the Vicar of Christ, and the successor of Peter;—that there is a real presence of Christ in the supper;—that saints are to be invoked, and images made use of, &c. they immediately rent their cloaths, cried out aloud Blasphemy! Blasphemy! and the council broke up,

Harleian Miscell. Vol. 1, Page 369.

This is a point of great importance, which it were to be wished that every one wearing the Protestant name, clearly understood. The *name* of Popery indeed seems in general, among all denominations of Protestants, to be held in sufficient detestation, as containing in it something exceedingly pernicious; but its *nature*, alas, is little attended to, and its spirit is imbibed by many, who are frequently heard to exclaim against it. For, What is the spirit of Popery? Is it not the imposing of the determinations of one man, or of a set of men, or the consciences of others, by whatever means may appear the most effectual to accomplish it, and thereby precluding all free enquiry respecting the things that are thus imposed? Where then this power of imposing is claimed by any, whether pope, king, parliament, bishops, or church, there the very soul of popery exists; and though for the present many superstitious practices may be expunged, yet no assurance can be had that these, and even worse, will not again be introduced. For, whoever has a right to impose any one doctrine, or any one practice, on any of his fellow men, has a right to impose a thousand, nor can any line be drawn whereby the boundary can be ascertained. That reformation therefore which consists merely in transferring an unjust authority from one set of men to another,

is rather nominal than real; and what improvements soever may be made in other respects, while this remains it is exceedingly defective.

The causes that contributed to the destruction of Christianity, in a great part of the Christian world, being now explored, the means of restoring it to its primitive original, or of preserving it from future corruptions, appear sufficiently obvious. Freedom of enquiry, and freedom of practice, are the only means that can effectuate so glorious a work. For, tho' genuine Christianity can be produced only by the powerful agency of its all glorious Author, yet I may safely affirm, that whenever his agency is exerted on men, it operates in the manner I am now describing: it influences the mind to serious, dispassionate enquiry, and induces them to act with firmness and vigour.

Thus long before the Roman hierarchy received its greatest blow, at the well-known era of the reformation, there were several whom God raised up, and enabled to bear a glorious testimony against it. Among the principal of those magnanimous witnesses, we may reckon Hufs, and Wickliffe, especially the latter of them, who nobly defended the rights of conscience; and tho' they could not dispel the thick gloom of error and ignorance, which at that time overspread the Christian

world, they however diffused such a light as was never afterwards totally extinguished, but laid the foundation on which the Reformation was built, and on which alone primitive Christianity can be supported. For, as an historian of those times observes, when speaking of the beginning of Luther's opposition to the Papal hierarchy, so small a spark as that collision made, could never have raised so great a fire, if the world had not been strongly disposed to it, by the just prejudices they had conceived against the Popish clergy, on account of their ignorance and lewdness, and by the corruptions of doctrine and worship which they perceived in that church : and he adds, that those corruptions were of so gross a nature, that a very small proportion of common sense, with a slight attention to the New Testament, were sufficient to discover them.* Succeeding generations therefore, it is evident, were highly indebted to those celebrated men, for their fortitude in combating so formidable a foe ; and their names will be transmitted to posterity with honour, while those of their oppressors are held in contempt.

If then to examine doctrines, to rectify errors, and to correct abuses, be just, hon-

* Burnet's Hist. of the Reformation. Vol. i. page 30.

ourable, and necessary, at one time, it is so always; and if it be just, honourable, and necessary for any one Christian to do this, it is equally so for all, as indeed it is every one's indispensable duty. For so long as doctrines or duties are received and attended to merely on the authority of men, such faith and obedience can never be acceptable in the eye of God, as they are destitute of that essential ingredient in all acceptable performances, A regard to the Divine Authority. Those persons therefore, and those only, who have thrown off the fetters of human impositions, and who at all events dare to think and act for themselves, are capacitated to preserve christianity pure; and it were I think easy to prove, by a collection of historical facts, that the preaching, writing, conversation, and conduct of such persons, have more or less in every age effectuated so glorious an object. Is it not evident to every intelligent person, that we in this land in the present day, are greatly indebted to our illustrious and magnanimous ancestors called Puritans, not only for the religious liberty which we enjoy, but also for that purity in doctrine and worship, which in some degree at least at present exists among us? Ought not we therefore to manifest an equal regard to *our* posterity, and assiduously endeavour, by

carefully searching after truth, and resolutely opposing all innovations, to transmit Christianity to them in its native simplicity, unadulterated by the traditions of men? Is not a procedure of this kind, as Christians, our incumbent duty; a duty which we owe both to God and to numbers of our species which are yet unborn? By such a conduct, and by such a one *only*, we may have the pleasure to reflect, future generations will rise up and call us blessed; and a people will be formed in our own Isle to be witnesses for Christ, as long as the sun and moon endure. What heart that feels the importance of Christianity, and beats with affection towards the rising generation, can remain undetermined what conduct to hold, when a motive like this is rightly perceived!

S E C T I O N IV.

SUCH a freedom of enquiry, moreover, will greatly contribute to form a judicious, solid, and useful Christian.—Now to be a *judicious* Christian, is undoubtedly an acquisition of great importance, since it is the subject of many a scriptural prayer; and such Christians, on a comparison with others, are denominated *perfect*, nay are even dignified with the honourable appellation of *fathers*.

But how shall so desirable an object be attained? Will the ministry of the gospel only be sufficient to effectuate it? I apprehend not. The ministry, 'tis true, is an ordinance of divine appointment, one great end of which is, the spiritual improvement of Christians, by leading them into a greater acquaintance with the divine will. Those ministers accordingly, who feed the people with knowledge and understanding, are affirmed to be pastors of whom God himself peculiarly approves. But then it is not hearing merely, no not even hearing the most judicious teachers, that will of itself make judicious hearers: much less will an injudicious ministry effect this; and least of all can it be expected by persons who run from place to place, and hear a mixture of truth and error, sense and nonsense, without almost either any deliberation on what they hear, or any perusal of the scriptures in order to form a judgment of it.

If a Christian would be judicious, he must not only be a diligent *hearer* of the word, but an attentive *reader* of it too: or, to use a stronger phrase, he must *search* the scripture; which undoubtedly implies an earnest endeavour to find out the true meaning of what is contained in that sacred treasury. Independent of this practice, it were in vain to expect, that ever we should be skilful in

the word of righteousness, or have any extensive acquaintance with gospel truth. But by a close and persevering attention to the inspired writings, we shall of course enjoy a growing acquaintance with the most important objects, and the word of Christ will dwell in us richly.

Would any Christian, for example, know the gospel in its native simplicity, and perceive the basis on which it rests ; -- let him read the history of Jesus Christ as recorded by the four evangelists, and the Acts of the apostles, compared with the prophecies of the Old Testament. Would he be skilful in distinguishing the pure truths of Christianity from all adulterated and counterfeit doctrines ; -- let him read the epistles of Paul. Would he know what pure and undefiled religion is, in distinction from all unprofitable talk about it ; -- let him read the epistle of James. Would he acquire fortitude of mind openly to profess the truth, patience in suffering for his steady adherence to it, and have his veneration for human authority and great names abated ; -- let him read the epistles of Peter and Jude. Would he be satisfied that his joys are not the joys of the hypocrite, but that they arise from fellowship with the true God, consequently that they are the pledges and beginnings of eternal life ; -- let him read the epistles of John. Would he, in a word, know the

true state and appearance of the church of Christ in this world, and how it is distinguished from the antichristian one ; --let him read the book of Revelation.—Thus are the scriptures *profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness ; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished to all good works.* (2 Tim. 3. 16, 17.)

Equally too is the practice I am recommending calculated to make the Christian *solid*, as it is to make him judicious. The former indeed is a natural consequence of the latter. For, while even those who are born from above, remain injudicious, and have not their spiritual senses exercised, they are apt to be driven to and fro like a wave of the sea, and carried about as a feather in the air, with every wind of doctrine to which they are exposed. When they hear error described by the tongue of eloquence, enforced with all the warmth of zeal, and recommended by the sanction of learning too, they are apt to mistake it for divine truth, and to receive it as proceeding immediately from God. Whereas the judicious Christian can instantly distinguish between things that differ : he considers the matter delivered, separate from the character of him who delivers it, and it is neither eloquence, zeal, nor learning, that can impose error on him under the guise

and appearance of truth. Those qualities indeed he highly esteems, but with him they can never make bitter pass for sweet, nor sweet be taken for bitter. He knows the Shepherd's voice wherever he hears it, and cheerfully walks in the way which that voice prescribes to him, even though it happen to be the way which is every where spoken against.

Besides, the Christian who diligently searches the scripture, will attain solidity in another view: he will not be shaken in his mind at the bad conduct of those who, after having assumed the Christian name, and perhaps worn it some time with a degree of credit, have fallen again into the paths of vice. He that has not turned his thoughts towards the constitution of a Christian church, nor attentively considered the epistolary part of the New Testament, is apt to be greatly shaken, when he sees some who were apparently zealous professors, apostatise from their profession, and walk again in the paths of immorality. The weak Christian staggers at this, and partly through his own defective understanding, and partly by the influence of Satan, is ready to think that surely religion is an unsubstantial visionary thing! Whereas, the man who has had his spiritual senses exercised, and has been conversant with the sacred writings, recollects

that even in our Lord's own family there was a son of perdition, and that in those churches erected under the eye of the apostles themselves, there were several who were Christians in *name* only and not in reality. When therefore he sees those who promised fair, throw off the Christian garb, and associate again with the men of the world, -- nay who perhaps become bitter revilers of what they once zealously professed; though he cannot but be sorely grieved at such a procedure, knowing the fatal consequences that will attend it with respect to many, yet it does not at all affect his mind as to Christianity itself, or in the least diminish his esteem for it. On the contrary, it is rather a confirmation of his faith, as he knows that such a procedure is an accomplishment of scripture declarations.

After what has been observed relative to the practice I am pleading for, having a direct tendency to form a judicious and solid Christian, it will be superfluous to add, that such a person must be *useful* in the station he is placed in, be that station what it may. This is the man who maintains such an uniformity of character as will bear the examination of those that are around him. This is the man who strengthens the hands of the feeble, and often pours the balm of consolation into the bleeding mind. This is the man who, to

use the Psalmist's image, taken from one of the most beautiful objects in nature, is *like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season*: a tree, whose branches the storms may indeed bend, but whose roots it cannot touch; a spreading, fruitful tree, which is not only admired for its beauty, but blessed by the traveller for the shade, and by the hungry for the sustenance it affords him. — This is the man, in a word, whose light will shine with one steady, undiminished blaze, till at last it be attracted into its genuine source, the Sun of everlasting glory.

SECTION V.

ANOTHER motive to enforce the exercise of this right, and which I should imagine will be peculiarly influential on all that love the Saviour in sincerity, may be drawn from their redemption from misery by the price of his blood. — *Ye are bought with a price*, says the apostle to the Corinthian converts, *be not ye* THE SERVANTS OF MEN. (1 Cor. 7. 23.) What an animating motive! Bought with a price—not a price composed of silver and gold, nor of crowns and kingdoms,—but a price of infinite greater value, even the Saviour's precious blood! Frequently reflect then, Christians, both on what you

are redeemed from, and what an inconceivable price was paid for your redemption ! Remember that as the Lord Jesus Christ gave himself for you, to redeem you from all iniquity, that ye might not continue to be the servants of *sin* ; so he gave himself for you to redeem you from *your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers*, that ye might not be the servants of *men*.

Long, perhaps, did many of you practise the superstition of your fathers, -- long engage in a *vain conversation*, or in a vain worship, while ye were ignorant of your folly, and thoughtlessly trod in the steps of your ancestors. For, it is too true, that let a form of worship be ever so tedious with pompous ceremonies, ever so full of ridiculous fopperies, ever so unworthy of reasonable creatures to engage in, or of God to receive, -- yet if it have descended down to men from their forefathers, and can plead the authority of age and prescription, a strong attachment to it is rivetted in the mind.

How many, for instance, are there, even in this land of gospel light, who can give no other account of the grounds of their worship, than that their ancestors worshipped in the same way before them ! Thus they have received their religion, in part at least, as they have received their estates, and are

reluctant to enquire into the validity of the conveyance. But how unworthy of the Christian character is such a procedure as this! What little regard do such persons discover, to the commands and example of the great Head of the church!—Others, again, believe such doctrines, practise such duties, or worship by such forms, because some persons of reputation for learning, or piety, or both, do the same. But is not this evidently to be the servants of *men*? Is it not to yield an undue submission to their authority, and so far as lies in us to defeat, in one particular at least, the grand design of the death of Christ?

If then Christians it be true that your risen and exalted Saviour gave himself for you, to deliver you from all superstitious worship, implicit faith, and blind obedience;—if he really suffered, bled, and died, that ye might not be the servants of men, and to invest you with a liberty of the most glorious kind;—then why should ye be *subject to ordinances of man's devising? Touch not, taste not, handle not, after the commandments and doctrines of men.* (Col. 2. 20.—22.) But, on the contrary, let the Redeemer's love constrain you to adhere to the rule which he has given you, to revere his authority as the only lawgiver to his church, and to bear an undaunted testimony against

all the innovations of your fellow men. Thus will you make it appear, that the great end of redemption is obtained in you, and that you are resolved to stand fast in that liberty wherewith Christ has made you free. That undeviating regard to the authority of Jesus which I am now urging, is not a chimerical, but a real duty. Your obligations to the performance of it grow out of the undeserved favour he has manifested towards you. Shall any Christian then, who hopes to enjoy the great benefits of redemption, ever repine at the obligations these lay him under, to oppose the innovations and doctrines of men? Rather, will not a lively sensation of gratitude towards so generous a Benefactor, powerfully stimulate the mind of every redeemed person, to spend his whole life in so noble an employ? Animated by such a motive, methinks every Christian will exert himself with vigour, in opposing every doctrine and every practice, which he believes to be foreign to true Christianity. But should any of my readers have degraded himself so far, as tamely to yield to the authority of men with respect to the object of his faith or of his duty; I would beg such a person to re-consider, how far he answers the end of his redemption, and whether he act as gratitude should prompt him?

SECTION VI.

THE last motive I shall urge on this occasion, is, the peculiar happiness connected with such a conduct in this world, and the everlasting honours it will certainly be rewarded with in the future.—Divine truth, wherever she meets with a cordial reception, will always bear her own charges. Amply will she compensate all that love her, for whatever they may suffer on her account. Those who *keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ* (which is the discriminating character of a true Christian, Rev. 12. 17.) may be reproached, and fined, and imprisoned, and banished from their native country, nay even brought to the stake, for their steady adherence to these interesting objects: but neither reproaches, nor fines, nor imprisonment, nor exile, nor even the most excruciating pains inflicted on them, can deprive them of that peace and comfort they enjoy, which is imparted to them by the God of truth, whose they are, and whom they serve.

When the beloved disciple was banished into the desolate island of Patmos, *for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ*, the discoveries of divine glory that were given him there, undoubtedly filled his soul with unspeakable happiness; so that even

Cæsar on his imperial throne might be deemed miserable, when compared with this aged and exiled faint. And even admitting that those discoveries, in part at least, are not to be expected by every disciple in suffering circumstances, still there is enough absolutely promised, fully to compensate for every trial. Accordingly when Peter once, in the name of all the disciples, proposed this question to his Master, *We have forsaken all and followed thee, what shall we have therefore?* How memorable is the answer which Jesus gave! *Verily I say unto you, that YE who have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And EVERY ONE that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospels, shall receive a hundred fold NOW IN THIS TIME.* (Matt. 19. 27 &c. Mark 10. 29.)

Now the latter part of this declaration, is certainly expressive of that peace and consolation which such persons shall enjoy, partly from the testimony of a good conscience, and partly from that inward sense of the divine approbation, which the God of truth will assuredly give to all who suffer in so righteous a cause. This consideration therefore should animate the mind, firmly to adhere to the

cause of truth ; since a good conscience is a continual feast, and a sense of the divine approbation the highest pleasure that our nature, in this present state, is capable of enjoying. A faithful discharge of our duty, will afford a pleasure, I had almost said infinitely superior to what we can derive from any other source. Not that any should court persecution with a view to enjoy the comfort that is promised to persons in such a state : for in this way they would I believe be greatly disappointed. But such promised comfort is surely a sufficient reason why a Christian should never deviate from the path of duty, in order to avoid the displeasure of men.

The Christian's prospects however, are not confined within the narrow bounds of this life, but are equally extensive with the promises of God. Already he has the earnest of his inheritance : even now everlasting life is begun in him ; and he looks forward with a steady eye towards that period, when he shall be put in the entire possession of that inheritance which he believes is in reserve for him, and when the everlasting life he is now the subject of shall arrive at its full completion. Is not this enough then, Christians, to inspire you with courage in every conflict, and to animate you to be faithful even to death ? Are not those immortal honours, which the Lord Jesus Christ hath

insured to all that faithfully serve him, sufficient to excite the most generous and unshaken fortitude in the open profession of his gospel? What, though you be deprived of worldly honours and emoluments,—though you should be stigmatised as persons of an illiberal complexion, and your names cast out as evil,—though you should forfeit the esteem of those whose approbation next to that of your Divine Master you could most desire,—though, in a word, you should suffer the loss of all things for your adherence to the way of truth, surely the never-fading crown of glory will amply compensate for it all!

Soon, very soon, will this world, with all its pomp and splendour, and with all its sorrows and sufferings too, for ever pass away,—soon will a never-ending scene present itself to our view; then to *have fought the good fight*, to have been *valiant for the truth*, to have taken up our crosses and followed our Divine Master in the ways of his appointment, will assuredly terminate in immortal honour and everlasting joy.

Would you then, Christians, inviolably maintain your allegiance to your glorious Sovereign,—would you cherish in your minds a cordial love to the truth,—would you as far as lies in your power prevent the erection of an ecclesiastical tyranny, preserve your reli-

gion in its native purity, and contribute to the happiness of succeeding generations,—would you be judicious, solid, and useful,—would you in some measure behave as those who are redeemed at an invaluable price,—would you, in fine, enjoy substantial happiness in this life, and everlasting felicity and honour in that world which is to come;—then examine with freedom and act with firmness. Let your hearts be *sound* in God's commandments, and despise those little, low, and sordid motives, by which baser minds are actuated, as unworthy of a place in a Christian's breast.

CHAPTER IV.

Directions relative to the proper Regulation of the Christian's right.

AS a conclusion of the whole, I will now give a few hints, by way of direction, relative to the Regulation of the right which I have been pleading for and enforcing; and I would hope that a due attention to them will be subservient in promoting the Christian's improvement, comfort, and honour.

SECTION I.

THE first thing which appears to me requisite to be attended to in this matter, is, To divest ourselves as much as possible of all partiality and prejudice; and to preserve a genuine simplicity of mind, ready to receive the impressions of truth, how contrary soever these may be to our former opinions. By partiality and prejudice I would be understood to mean, such a fondness for the notions we have imbibed, by what means soever we have imbibed them, as in a great measure, if not wholly, precludes any further enquiry into the grounds of them; and, in many cases at least, has such an influence on the mind, as effectually to stifle the impressions of truth.

The notions which are imbibed by education and converse, as we grow up from childhood to maturity, respecting both points of doctrine and modes of worship, have frequently a greater influence than men are aware of; so that there is a reluctancy to examine the truth of those doctrines, and the propriety of those modes of worship, which differ from what we have long been accustomed to. From this principle it was, that the fathers of the church (as they are called) even after the reformation begun, had so

great an influence on the minds of men, that scarcely any truth or duty was thought to be sufficiently confirmed by scripture testimonies, without additional vouchers from these ancients; and accordingly Tertullian, and Chrysostom, and Austin, and Jerome, regularly took their places on the same bench of judgment, with Paul, and Peter, and James, and John. Happily however this prejudice is eradicated out of the breasts of many, and when those ancients are produced against them as competent judges, they plainly deny the fact, and immediately appeal to a higher tribunal, the writings of Christ and the apostles only.

Prejudice then is a plant exceedingly pernicious; which, when it grows to any considerable height, casts its deadly shade over all the precious seeds of reason and of truth. If therefore we would make a proficiency in spiritual knowledge,--if we would maintain a conduct uniform and honourable, corresponding to the will of God as revealed in his word, we must impartially and ingenuously examine the scripture, where alone those truths and duties are contained which it is incumbent on Christians to believe and to practise.

The sacred penmen accordingly, have given frequent exhortations to such a procedure, as a necessary mean to facilitate our growth

in genuine Christianity. With all simplicity, *as new-born babes*, says the apostle Peter, *desire the sincere, or unmingled, milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby*. Prejudice therefore as well as passion, must be laid aside, if we would not be incapacitated for religious improvement. How is it possible, indeed, that a person should learn the doctrines or duties of Christianity, whilst he is under the influence of so pernicious a principle! When such a person reads the sacred books of scripture, he is perpetually liable to pervert or strain them, in order to make them speak his own sense. At one time perhaps he is so sharp-sighted, as to find his own notions supported in those passages of scripture, where the inspired writers had not the most distant idea of them: at another time he has such a dimness on his eyes, that he cannot see any thing contrary to his scheme, even though it appear on the very face of the passage. What an unhappiness then is it to be under the influence of a prejudiced mind! On the contrary, happy is the man whose mind is unbiassed in the judgment he forms,--who proportions his assent to the degree of evidence, and who is desirous to be led into an acquaintance with truth, by what hand soever he may be introduced into her presence.

SECTION II.

IN all our enquiries after truth and duty, we ought, in a dependence on divine direction, to make the best use of our own understandings.—It is, in my view, a first principle in religion, that true wisdom is the gift of God. It has its origin from above, being derived immediately from *the Father of lights*. (James. 1. 17.) If men therefore desire to be made partakers of it, they must frequently and importunately address themselves to him. Agreeable to this is the advice so repeatedly given in holy scripture: *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God—and it shall be given him.* (James. 1. 5.) Again, *Ask*, says our Lord, *and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you.* (Matt. 7. 7.)

Prayer, accordingly, and particularly for divine illumination, has been attended to by all good men, in every period of the world. How frequently, in the sacred history, do we meet with petitions for divine direction, in order to obtain a more enlarged comprehension of spiritual objects. *Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law! Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes!* With numerous others of the same class. Thus then it appears, that divine wisdom cannot be enjoyed, except in a way of humble prayer. Nay I may add further, that

some who have applied themselves to the search of religious truth, in a vain conceit of the strength of their own intellectual powers, without a regard to the divine aid, have been suffered to run into a wild extravagance of opinions, by which they have injured both themselves and others.

But then, as it is not sufficient to ask our daily bread of God, unless we be industrious in our civil affairs; equally groundless would it be to expect, that the way of truth and duty should be made known to us, except by the exercise of our own understandings. Such an expectation indeed, would be a great reflection on the Author of our nature, who has endued us with the faculty of reason, and thereby ennobled us above the other inhabitants of this terrestrial globe. For, reason is the eye of the mind, by which we see the evidence of Christianity, and are capacitated to distinguish between one object and another. The man therefore who, in matters of religion, would discard it as useless, acts full as absurdly as he who should put out his bodily eyes, in order to judge of the difference of colours.

Were not a Christian, for instance, to make use of his reason or understanding (for I use these two words as synonymous) to find out for himself that sense of scripture which is most agreeable to the mind of the Holy Spirit,

he might receive the most contrary senses at the same time, since it is by the use of reason alone that he discovers the contradiction.

We ought indeed to be particularly cautious, that we do not deceive ourselves by reasoning in a wrong manner : we should use our utmost endeavour to find out the principal design of the inspired writers, and take great care to affix that sense only to the words and phrases of scripture, which those writers themselves intended to express by them ;—but surely we ought not to give up the exercise of reason in any case whatever. In some cases indeed it extends only to the words and phrases of scripture (as I shall remark more particularly afterwards) but in others it extends also to the objects that are spoken of.—Is it not, for example, by the use of this faculty, that the doctrine of transubstantiation, tho' founded (as those who hold it affirm) on the plain words of our Saviour himself, is rejected as absurd? Though it be readily owned, that Christ says of the bread *This is my Body*, and of the cup *This is my Blood*, yet as, if we understand the words literally, they are a flat contradiction to reason, and as this is an object that may properly be scrutinized by reason, it is denied without the least hesitation.

Some persons it is true, (who I doubt not have meant well) have, I think incautiously,

asserted, that reason should always be submitted to faith ; which kind of phraseology seems to indicate, as though some of the doctrines of Christianity were incompatible with reason. But this , in my opinion, is a great mistake. Many of those doctrines indeed are of so sublime a kind, as that reason could never have discovered them ; and now when they are revealed, it is far from being able to comprehend their nature. But then it can make no solid objection as to the *truth* of any one of them : all may be firmly believed, and reason by no means be strained or perplexed.-- Nay even that doctrine which teaches the strict unity of God, and yet informs us that this one God subsists under the distinct appellations of Father, Word, and Holy Spirit, each of whom is possessed of the properties and powers peculiar to Godhead, though greatly exclaimed against by many in our day, yet in fact has nothing that appears unreasonable in it : and all the arguments that have been brought against it ultimately turn on this single hinge, That we must judge of the manner of God's existence from what we know of the existence of bodies : a position which I am sure is highly unreasonable, as I should imagine will appear to every thinking person at first sight.

Lay this down as a rule then, Christians, that when you have exercised your own un-

derstandings to the best of your power, on any part of divine revelation, in a dependence on the great Teacher, the judgment you form, even tho' erroneous, must certainly be final with respect to yourselves; nor should you servilely acquiesce in any other explication, till you are shewn that there is a defect in your reasoning, and consequently are convinced that you have been in an error.

The apostle Paul gives a decisive testimony to the case before us, which every Christian who would approve himself to God, should continually keep in view as the rule of his procedure. When treating of the different sentiments respecting *days* and *meats*, that prevailed among the Christians at Rome, in order to heal the divisions that had taken place among them, he gives this very express and extensive canon: *Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.* (Rom. 14. 5.) The obvious meaning of which seems to be this: Let him carefully examine the rule of his religion, to find the directions that are given him there; and then act according to the best light he can derive from it, giving his brother full liberty to do the same. Particularly let him be careful that he do not act contrary to what his conscience dictates after such an examination, since he will thereby certainly stand self-condemned.

The natural conclusion from the apostle's maxim therefore is, That a man's own determination of the sense of scripture, ought to be his last guide in whatever relates to religious matters. It is indeed the only safe principle on which he can proceed ; and to act contrary to it in any instance is not only *weak*, but *wicked* too, since in all such cases there is a direct violation of the divine authority ; or, which amounts to the same thing, what he *esteems* to be such. The dictates of our own consciences then, in every possible case, ought to give law to our actions ; and in every instance in which we deviate from this rule, we not only stand self-condemned, but are adjudged by apostolic decision to be guilty of sin. *For whatsoever is not of faith, whatever is contrary to the persuasion of a man's own mind, is sin.* (Rom. 14. 23.) This persuasion, arising from an attentive survey of the evidence proposed, is a man's last resource ; and a conduct in all respects corresponding to this, being a sufficient proof of the integrity of the mind, is certainly entitled to the approbation of all.

To conclude, let diligence and dependence, industry and devotion, join together, and you need not doubt the happy success. You know who hath said, *Incline thy ear to wisdom, and apply thy heart to understanding : if*

thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding ; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hidden treasures ; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. (Prov. 2. 2.—6.)

S E C T I O N III.

IT will be of great use too, for the proper regulation of this important right, Never to be solicitous to know more of those objects which are matters of pure revelation, than what the Holy Spirit has thought fit to reveal to us, in the scripture : but, on the contrary, to rest perfectly satisfied with those discoveries that he has made.

There seems to be an aptitude in man, to attempt being wise above what is written, and to give explications of things which he neither *does* know any thing of, nor possibly *can*, in his present state. From this source have arisen numerous disputes, respecting objects which, those disputers would have it thought, pertained to Christianity ; but which, in fact, were no other than the creatures of their own imagination. Were it likely to answer any good purpose, a long and curious list, respecting such matters, might be produced, about which men who have been called the Doctors of the church,

have disputed, and quarrelled, and even anathematized one another; though perhaps the knowledge of the objects in dispute, even supposing that they really existed, was of no more consequence in Christianity, than to know the precise meaning of *Higgaion, Selah*. (Psal. 9. 16.)

It will be of singular use therefore to distinguish well between those things that fall under the cognizance of our senses, and which consequently may with propriety be reasoned on, and those objects that are matters of pure revelation, of which we know nothing at all further than the revelation itself informs us. But if men will extend their reason beyond the bounds which its Author has prescribed for it,—if they will meddle with matters which are quite too high for them, it is no wonder that they run into the greatest absurdities.

Would it not, for example, be highly absurd, for any person to form a notion of *spirits*, from what he has observed to be the properties of *bodies*? Would it not be thought extremely ridiculous, for a man that had been blind from his birth, to propose giving lectures on the nature of colours? Equally absurd are all attempts to explain, or reason on, several parts of divine revelation. The wisest of men indeed have never attempted it. Nor did ever any person make the attempt,

but he involved both himself, and his readers, in a labyrinth of perplexity. Nor can I conceive how it should be otherwise. For, when men, who have been accustomed to exercise their reasoning powers on various objects, push their researches into matters of this kind, they resemble one who argues on the objects of a *sixth* sense, when at the same time he is possessed only of *five*. As soon indeed may we expect to see a smaller circle contain a greater, as to see a finite being comprehend the nature of him who is infinite.

To this class of objects, which are matters of pure revelation, may be referred, The manner of God's existence—the distinction, and unity, of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the union of the divine nature and the human in the person of Christ—with several others that bear a similarity to these. Now it is certain we cannot argue about these matters from any thing we are at present acquainted with, since we cannot possibly tell wherein they agree or disagree, and to argue about them from things we are *not* acquainted with, carries absurdity on the face of it: the obvious conclusion therefore is, That they are not to be argued about at all, but received and believed implicitly on the authority of God. The *reality* and *certainity* of those objects, and not the *manner*

of their existence, is what conduces to the Christian's comfort; consequently, a good man, instead of vainly attempting to explain or account for things of this nature, should rather thankfully embrace them, and adore the Divine goodness that ever such important discoveries were made. The *use* and not the *nature* of those objects, are what we should particularly be concerned to know, since it is the former and not the latter which contributes to our happiness. A man, for instance, may be an excellent navigator, he may both enrich himself and others by his superior skill in maritime affairs, and yet be totally unable to account either for the saltiness of the sea, or the action of the air. In like manner a Christian may use the objects I have been speaking of, for all the purposes of the Christian life, — he may believe, adore, love, and obey (the sum total of Christianity) and yet be unable to explain the modus of those objects. The intelligent Christian neither lays by his reason as useless, nor exercises it on matters that are entirely too high for him: he uses it as a talent which God has entrusted him with, and he enjoys the advantages which naturally result from it. Fully persuaded of the veracity of God, and of the vast importance of the objects revealed, he receives the truth in the love of it, and feels its salutary effects on his mind.

In a word, the proper province of reason is, in a dependence on divine direction, to find out the *true sense* of scripture, that sense which a man apprehends is suggested to him by the most obvious and unforced meaning of the sacred volume, and having found this, it is surely the most reasonable thing in the world, to admit it as infallibly true on the authority of him who cannot deceive! And on the other hand, to reject this sense of scripture, merely because we cannot comprehend *how* it is, is highly unreasonable, since the same principle, pursued in its consequences, would lead us to doubt both of the natural and moral perfections of God, nay even of our own existence too.

Be careful then Christians to distinguish between objects of pure revelation, and objects that fall under the cognizance of reason, as a mistake here may be attended with many pernicious consequences. Where such a distinction is not made, persons are apt to confound believing with reasoning. Hence, through the pride of the human heart, the plainest truths of revelation have been discarded; and many of the sons of science in later ages, as well as those of old, have esteemed the genuine gospel to be foolishness. This is a rock which numbers have split on, and thereby sustained irreparable injury. Happy the man who cautiously avoids it,

who steers his course by the divine chart,
till he reach the port of celestial felicity !

S E C T I O N IV.

IF, moreover, we would enjoy the divine approbation, we should fix in our minds a firm resolution to believe and act in all respects, as it appears to us that we are taught and commanded by the holy scripture ; how contrary soever to our former notions, or how disadvantageous soever to our temporal interests.

What advantage can possibly accrue to any man from searching the scripture, unless he firmly resolve to believe and act as it appears to him that he is taught and commanded by that sacred book ? Such a person indeed, by perusing those ancient records, may gratify his natural curiosity, from the historical narratives contained in them, and from the account he meets with of what has been believed and practised by a numerous people in a long succession of ages. He may gratify his pride too, by investigating the system of Christianity, in order to display his abilities to others, and obtain the incense of popular applause. But then it is evident he does not treat the scriptures as the word of God, since he has not formed any resolution to comply with their contents, which he most assuredly

would, were he fully persuaded of their Divine authority. He reads them much in the same manner as a Christian reads the Alcoran of Mahomet, not as designing to believe and act according to its directions, but to see what opinions, rites, and duties, constitute the religion which was so extensively propagated by that celebrated prophet. Or as a person may read a system of philosophy, and take great pains to make himself acquainted with it, that he may be entitled to a portion of literary fame.—But of what utility, in a religious view, can such a perusal as this be? Unless indeed it should please that God, who sometimes makes even the curiosity and passions of men subservient to promote his gracious designs, to strike a divine light in the soul, and thereby give an affecting view of the beauty, excellency, and importance, of those objects contained in the sacred volume.

Others, again, may read the scripture as being in reality the word of God, yet when they meet with any passage that appears to convey a contrary doctrine to what they have imbibed, or that enjoins a duty, the performance of which would thwart their temporal interests, and perhaps expose them to ridicule and reproach; they either put a forced construction on the passage, which will by no means agree with the design of the

writer, or they endeavour to satisfy themselves with the thought, that great numbers who have been in repute both for their learning and piety, have believed and practised in a different manner. Thus they impose on themselves at various times, and yet would be thought to pay a regard to scripture authority. But surely in all cases of this nature, the authority of scripture is out of the question : persons of this complexion, it is evident, are influenced by an authority of a quite different nature from that of scripture ; and though in some cases they may happen to believe or to practise what is right, yet they certainly neither do the one nor the other because God has taught or commanded it, but because it is believed and practised by men of such a particular description : and what kind of Christian obedience that is, which has no respect to the authority of God, I leave every one to judge.

If then Christians you would act in character, — if you would behave yourselves in such a manner as is pleasing to God, and will consequently give you a peaceful mind, firmly resolve, in a dependence on divine aid, to believe whatever the scripture teaches you, and to do whatever is commanded by it. This alone is to make it the rule of your faith and practice ; and should such a pro-

cedure expose you to the reproach of men, and perhaps be disadvantageous to you in several respects, as to your temporal interests, yet (as has already been observed) you will be amply compensated, both by a consciousness of your own integrity, and by, what is still more valuable, a sense of the Divine approbation. For it is a declaration which will certainly be accomplished, *He that bath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and we will come to him and make our abode with him.*

SECTION V.

THE last direction I shall give for the due regulation of so important a right, is, to guard against a censorious spirit towards your fellow Christians who differ from you; and, on the contrary, to love them with unfeigned affection as sincere, though in your apprehension mistaking servants of your common Master.

A point of unity there must of course be, in which all that are real, and not merely nominal Christians will unite. Every one that *believeth on the Son of God*, whatever denomination of Christians he be connected with, or whether by the peculiarity of his situation and circumstances he be uncon-

ned with any, has a view of his native state and character as guilty and depraved,—considers what the Lord Jesus Christ has done and suffered for sinners as the sole requisite of acceptance with God,—makes that atonement, or righteousness, the ground of his hope and his joy,—regards the Spirit of God as his Sanctifier and Comforter,—in a word, *fears God and works righteousness*, and thus has *the witness in himself*, and gives evidence to others, that he is passed from death to life. If then these things be common to all real believers (and common I think they must be) then it may be affirmed, that they are much more agreed than what they often clearly apprehend, or in some cases are even willing to confess.

The fact therefore being as I have now stated it, is there not a solid foundation for the exercise of Christian love with respect to all of the above complexion? Ought not all who are of the character specified, to esteem each other as servants of the same Master, children of the same Father, and heirs of the same inheritance? Does it become them to be censorious and ill-natured in their reflections one on another? Rather, should they not heartily unite in promoting the same common cause, in opposition both to the nominal Christians and the openly profane? In the first ages of Christianity, when the

tide of contention between the Jewish and the Gentile converts ran high, the apostle endeavoured to stem the torrent, by informing them that the things wherein they differed were but of little importance, when compared with those capital truths and duties in which they were agreed. He endeavoured to convince them, that *the kingdom of God, or true Christianity, is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost*; and that they all of them were the subjects of this kingdom, though they contended so warmly about herbs and holy-days.

Having inculcated this truth, he next points out to them the use that should be made of it. *Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things where-with one may edify another. Let us not judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block, or on occasion to fall in his brother's way.* (See Rom. 15. throughout.) How desirable is such a temper and disposition as this; and how excellent a character does it form! Happy the man who cultivates it with assiduity, and thus lets his moderation be known to all men.

When indeed a party-spirit rises high among the different classes of Christian professors, and there are many zealots on both sides of a dispute, the lover of peace and

moderation will frequently be exposed to bitter invectives, from both the parties so warmly engaged. When he would throw in a softning word, with a view to compromise matters between them, how often is he called by the opprobrious term of luke-warm professor, with other appellations of a similar nature.

At a council held in the fourth century respecting the Arian controversy, after a great deal of fiery and ill-natured contention had taken place, and the prevailing party seemed determined to suppress the other by the rough hand of violence, a Christian, and a lover of peace, who lived in obscurity, stood up and said :

“ My brethren, the things to be believed
“ are few ; the things to be done are many ;
“ but you behave yourselves as if the reverse
“ of this were true. The apostle Paul tells
“ you, *The grace of God that bringeth salvation,*
“ *bath appeared to all men ; teaching us, that*
“ *denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should*
“ *live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this pre-*
“ *sent world, looking for that blessed hope, and*
“ *the glorious appearing of the great God, and*
“ *our Saviour Jesus Christ.* Concerning the
“ nature of Jesus you can dispute incessantly,
“ and concerning the word *grace*, you will
“ probably dispute no less : but the rest of
“ the sentence you disregard as of small con-

“sequence or importance. What, I beseech
 “you, must the Jews and Pagans think of
 “you and of your religion? And what do
 “the holy angels think, who look down up-
 “on your contentions? These blessed and
 “compassionate spirits pity you, and think
 “you mere children. But when from con-
 “tending, you proceed to beating your fel-
 “low-servants, to persecuting and destroying,
 “they consider you as most malicious and
 “wicked children; their pity is changed into
 “indignation, and they would strike you
 “dead, if the Supreme Governor did not
 “stay their hand, and remind them that
 “such disorders must needs arise, and shall
 “one day be rectified.”

“So said this *unknown* : but behold
 “the consequence ! The Consubstantialists*
 “called him an Arian, and the Arians called
 “him a Consubstantialist.”†

A treatment similar to the above may the
 pacific Christian expect, from those whose
 zeal exceeds their knowledge, because he re-
 fuses to enter into their clamorous debates
 and violent measures. Let him not however

* Those who maintained that the Father, Son,
 and Holy Spirit, are possessed of the *same divine*
nature, or have a *natural equality*.

† Dr. Jortin's Remarks on Eccl. Hist. vol. 2.
 pag. 218.

be discouraged at this, but still persevere in so honourable a conduct; and what reproaches soever he may meet with from men, he will certainly enjoy the approbation of God. Nay when the ferment of passions which false zeal has excited, begins to subside, and the minds of such persons are calm enough to see things in their proper colours, the peaceable candid Christian will stand approved of men as well as of God, and enjoy that respect he is justly entitled to.

If indeed any that professes the leading truths of Christianity, give reason to believe that he is a temporizer, or would make a gain of godliness, or shape his religion to be acceptable to men, his disguise ought, if possible, to be stript off, and his true character openly exposed, that others may be preserved from his pernicious influence. To expose a character of this kind, when there is proper evidence of it, is so far from being a breach of Christian charity, that on the contrary it is a strong expression of it. Thus Paul, when his brother Peter was guilty of dissimulation, and walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, exposed his false principles before the society at large, lest they also should be induced to imitate his conduct. But where that integrity which ought ever to be maintained by the real Christian, appears in any one who professes Christia-

nity, he certainly is entitled to our regard, though we consider him in the light of a mistaking brother.

There is not indeed any single doctrine which Christ has taught, nor any act of worship he has enjoined, no nor any precept he has prescribed, but a belief of the one, and an observance of the other, will contribute to the advantage of any Christian. But then some of those doctrines, acts of worship, and moral duties, are confessedly of far greater importance than others; and in those more important ones, as was before observed, all real Christians are agreed. Since therefore this agreement lays the foundation of Christian affection, since they all of them see but in part, and none can lay a claim to infallibility, is not this a reason, and a sufficient one too, why they should exercise candour and forbearance with respect to the things wherein they differ?

Every Christian indeed, in perfect agreement both to the letter and the spirit of the laws of Christianity, is left at full liberty not only to believe and to act as appears to him most agreeable to the mind of Christ, but also to declare his *reasons* why he believes this doctrine, or practises that duty; and as prudence shall dictate, to argue the point at large with any of his brethren he occasionally converses with. And I may add, that the

Christian who is averse to hear the reasons of a brother, respecting the objects wherein they differ, supposing he has never attentively considered them, discovers a mind greatly prejudiced in his own favour; and he who cannot hear such reasons assigned, without feeling his spirit inflamed with passion, has a considerable share of self-importance, which it is both his duty and interest to divest himself of.

Let it always be your endeavour Christians, that every part of divine truth be the object of your regard, in proportion as its relative importance in the gospel system seems to demand. Imitate the apostle's conduct, when he so nobly defended the Gentile converts with respect to their freedom from the ceremonial law, in supporting according to your ability, whatever you are persuaded is truth or duty. Give place by subjection no not for an hour, that the truth of the gospel may be continued with you.

Absurd undoubtedly it would be, if I may allude to what is said of some ancient religionists, to plead for the mint, the annise, and the cummin, while the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith, are omitted. The rule in all cases of this nature is, *These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.* (Matt. 23. 23.)

When however any doctrine or duty has been fairly and honestly canvassed between two parties, and after all, each thinks himself in the right, why should not each exercise candour towards the other, and permit him both to enjoy his own sentiments, and to propagate what he apprehends to be right in the best manner his abilities will admit him? What harm would result from such a procedure? Does it argue a want of Christian zeal? No: true zeal is subject to the direction of divine precepts; and whatever, under the appearance of zeal, exceeds these bounds, is a false flame, and as such is both displeasing to God and prejudicial to men.—Will it weaken the Christian cause? No: it will rather add strength and consistence to it.—Will it be displeasing in the sight of God? No: he has not authorized any of his servants to judge a fellow servant, but has reserved that province solely to himself. *Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth.* (Rom. 14. 4.) On the contrary as was before observed, this kind of moderation will be highly acceptable to God, and the subject of it will certainly be approved of by him.

While then Christians ye are solicitously careful to please God in the whole of your deportment,—while ye attentively read his word as your sole directory, and conscien-

tiously attend to every branch of his will as there disclosed to you,—while ye cordially embrace whatever appears to you divine truth, and chearfully practise what you apprehend commanded duty, cultivate a spirit of love towards your fellow travellers to the celestial country, and sincerely bid them *God speed*. Lay this down as a maxim in religion, that a firm attachment to principles of your own, is perfectly consistent with the most liberal sentiments, even towards those of your fellow Christians who maintain opinions directly opposite to you. If at any time it lie in your power to set a brother right, by leading him into a further acquaintance with his Master's will, do it with pleasure ; but beware of censuring him as wilfully blind, because he sees not with your eyes. How desirous soever you may be, that others may enter into your views of Christianity, or adopt your sentiments respecting it, be assured that for any individual Christian to do this, is not likely to answer any good purpose, further than he is clearly convinced both of their propriety and importance from the evidence of scripture.

To conclude, whatever truth or duty ye are in possession of, wherein ye apprehend that ye have the advantage of your brethren, rejoice in it ; hold it fast ; improve it ; and thus make it appear that every part of God's

revealed will is precious to you, and that it is your highest ambition to please him in the whole of your behaviour. Keep a constant guard over your spirit, that it break not out into invectives against those that differ from you, but always remember that true *charity*, that most excellent grace, without which all other things are vain, *suffereth long, and is kind—doth not behave itself unseemly—seeketh not its own—is not easily provoked—and rejoiceth in the truth. It beareth all things—believeth all things—hopeth all things—endureth all things.* Thus *fight the good fight* in the true spirit of Christianity, *keep the faith*, and ye will finish your course with joy, and receive that *crown of righteousness, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.*

23 OC 62

T H E E N D.

